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NOT TRADITION,

BUT

SCRIPTURE.

BY

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Si reputamus quàm lubricus sit humanæ mentis lapsus in Dei oblivionem; quanta in omne genus erroris proclivitas; quanta ad confingendas identidem novas et fictitias religiones libido; perspicere licebit, quàm necessaria fuerit talis cœlestis doctrinæ consignatio; ne vel oblivione deperiret, vel errore evanesceret, vel audaciâ hominum corrumperetur.

Calvini Institutio, lib. i. cap. 6.

FIRST AMERICAN FROM THE THIRD LONDON EDITION.

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ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

THIRD LONDON EDITION.

THE object of the Author in publishing the first Edition of the following short tract a twelvemonth ago, was that of recording his personal protest against a system of doctrines recently attempted to be revived after the lapse of more than a century, and which have ever appeared to him to be founded upon mistaken views of the general tenor and character of Scripture. Officially connected as he has been for many years with the university of Oxford, he had for some time waited with no small anxiety, in the hope that some of its more qualified and influential members would come forward for the purpose of disclaiming what in public opinion had been considered as pre-eminently constituting the Oxford school of theology. Finding himself in great measure disappointed in this expectation, he put forth the present publication with the intention now stated, namely, that of presenting rather a brief summary of his own views, than a complete discussion in all its details of an intricate and much agitated question. His work having obtained a larger circulation than he had originally anticipated, a new impression of it is now laid before the public, with such additional matter and illustrations as appeared necessary for rendering the main argument more com-

plete. It is, however, with no small gratification that he perceives that in the course of the present year the controversy has fallen into far abler hands than his own. The important point under discussion, is now fairly at issue before the public; and from the learning and ability which have been brought to bear upon it from various quarters, he cannot feel any apprehension with respect to the final issue of the controversy. The strictly evangelical view, as it is called, of the Christian covenant, is so much more in accordance with the crying wants of our spiritual nature, and so much more consistent with the language of the New Testament, than the system of theology which has been recently revived in opposition to it, that the respective schemes would seem to require only to be plainly stated, in order to establish the superior claims of the former. The question involved in the discussion is, in fact, no less than that of the first foundation upon which all our hopes of salvation are to be built:—Whether we are to consider works as leading to justification, or justification as necessarily leading to good works; whether holiness is the efficient cause of faith, or faith that of holiness? The first Reformers of our Church believed and taught the latter doctrine; and, however (whether induced by feelings of ascetic devotion, or relying upon presumed intellectual strength and extensive learning) men may be tempted for the moment to deviate from the ancient and familiar paths, to this conclusion will the rallying good sense and spiritual aspirations of mankind, in their sober and unprejudiced moments, most assuredly return. It is asserted, upon what appears to be good authority, that the pious, eloquent, and learned Alexander Knox strongly felt and acknowledged in his last moments the unsatisfactory nature of those theological views which he has so ably defended in his writings, and his final

preference of the doctrine of divine Grace as inculcated by the earlier Protestants. It is natural that so highly a gifted and so well disposed a mind should come to such a conclusion. Human nature in its distress, and under a deep sense of its spiritual wants, soon begins to feel that nothing short of the plenary mercy promised to the repentant soul through *faith* can fully meet the emergency. In the buoyancy of health, and the excitement of intellectual controversy, we may think otherwise; but in the hour of need, our self-reliance necessarily gives place to thoughts more consistent with our perfectly helpless and dependent position.

As a conclusion to these few remarks, let the Author here express his sincere hope and belief, that not a word will be found in the following pages inconsistent with the feelings of Christian charity, or incompatible with his real respect for the undoubted good intentions of the party to whose views he is opposed. That they have adopted distorted views of many portions of God's revealed will, he does not hesitate in stating as his decided conviction. And under this impression he has felt it his duty to enter his protest against a system of doctrine opposed, as he conceives, to sound evangelical orthodoxy. But in justice to them he feels himself also bound to state, that in many respects he conceives them to have done good service to the cause of religion, by the opposition which they have made to the laxity of modern unchristian speculation, and the increased attention which they have excited in the public mind with respect to the polity and discipline of the primitive Church.

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“THE Universal Lord gave to his Apostles authority to preach the Gospel, by whose means we possess knowledge of the truth, that is to say, the doctrine of the Son of God; to which same Apostles the Lord also said, ‘He who heareth you, heareth me; and he who despiseth you, despiseth me and him who sent me.’ For by no other persons have we been instructed in the dispensation of salvation than by those through whom the Gospel has been delivered to us; which Gospel *they at the first preached by word of mouth, but afterwards, by God’s will, handed down to us in writing*, to be the foundation and pillar of our faith. * * * Thus Matthew among the Hebrews *published his written Gospel* in the language of that people, at the time that Peter and Paul were preaching the Gospel and founding their Church at Rome. But after their removal from the world, Mark, the disciple and amanuensis of Peter, himself *delivered to us in writing* the facts which had been communicated to him by Peter; and Luke also, the follower of Paul, *published in a book* the Gospel which had been preached by that Apostle. Lastly, John also, the disciple of our Lord, who reclined upon his breast at supper, himself also *published his Gospel* while resid-

ing at Ephesus in Asia.”* *Adversus Hæres. lib. 3. cap. 1.*

Such is the testimony of Irenæus to the sufficiency and completeness of the *written* works of the first teachers of Christianity as a summary of Christian doctrine. That which they originally taught by word of mouth, says he, the same they afterwards put into writing; and those writings are *the books of the New Testament*. Here is not the slightest intimation that their oral instruction was in any respect wider in extent of doctrine than that written record which has descended to our times. So far is the primitive author now quoted from asserting that the first Apostles entrusted any of their doctrines to the uncertain vehicle of mere tradition, that his expressions are scarcely compatible with such a supposition. Not even the remotest suspicion to that effect appears to have glanced across his mind. The above words, it should be remembered, were directed by him against the Gnostic heretics of his day, with reference to whom he thus continues his argument on the subject of *Tradition*: “For when they are refuted from Scripture, they (i. e. the Valentinians) *turn their attack against the Scripture itself, as incorrect, as not of sufficient authority, as vague and contradictory,*

* “Dominus omnium dedit Apostolis suis potestatem Evangelii, per quos et veritatem, hoc est, Dei Filii doctrinam cognovimus; quibus et dixit Dominus, ‘Qui vos audit, me audit; et qui vos contemnit, me contemnit et eum qui me misit.’ Non enim per alios dispositionem salutis nostræ cognovimus, quam per eos per quos Evangelium pervenit ad nos; quod quidem *tunc præconiaverunt; postea vero per Dei voluntatem in Scripturis nobis tradiderunt*, fundamentum et columnam fidei nostræ futuram. * * * Ita Matthæus in Hebræis ipsorum lingua *scripturam edidit Evangelii*, cum Petrus et Paulus Romæ evangelizarent et fundarent Ecclesiam. Post vero horum discessum, Marcus, discipulus et interpret Petri, et ipse quæ a Petro annunciata erant, *per scripta nobis tradidit*; et Lucas, sectator Pauli, quod ab illo prædicabatur Evangelium *in libro condidit*. Postea et Joannes, discipulus Domini, qui et supra pectus ejus recumbebat, et *ipse edidit evangelium Ephesi Asiæ commorans*.” *Adversus Hæres. lib. 3. cap. 1.*

and incapable of affording perception of the truth to persons unacquainted with Tradition."* Adversus Hæres. lib. 3. cap. 2.

It appears, from the above quotation, that the first appeal to floating tradition, as containing articles of belief in *addition* or in contradiction to the records of holy writ, was made by the earliest of those numerous classes of heretics, who at so early a period of the Church attempted to engraft their own inventions upon the revelation of God's will. And much indeed it were to be wished that the argument here adduced against the completeness of Scripture, as a rule of faith, had been confined to the school now mentioned, and that far holier and better men had not been from time to time led away by it, to set up the uncertain, and (as painful experience has shown) the dangerous standard of tradition as a concurrent and equally obligatory authority by its side. But on this subject, I shall have more to urge by and by. At present let me proceed by concluding my extract from Irenæus. In reply, then, to the above-quoted appeal of his opponents from the sure and tangible test of the written Gospel, to their own traditions, or, in other words, to their own gratuitous additions to revelation, the good Father proceeds to urge, that even with respect to tradition, the orthodox Church can again confidently meet them on their own ground, and plead against their arbitrary assumptions, the sound traditions derived by the Church directly from the Apostles themselves, which will be found in all points to harmonize and coincide with the written word.

* "Cum enim ex Scripturis arguuntur (Valentiniani videl.) in *accusationem vertuntur ipsarum scripturarum*; quasi non recte habeant, neque sint ex autoritate, et quia varie sint dicta, et quia non possit in his inveniri veritas ab his qui nesciant Traditionem." Adversus Hæres. lib. 3. cap. 2.

Such was the decided preference of Scripture to Tradition, or rather it might appear more correct to say, the almost exclusive adoption of the former, as a revelation of God's will, displayed by this early Christian writer. In fact, so entirely does this good and single-minded man appear to have considered the written word as complete in itself, that he proceeds, in a subsequent passage, to argue with more honest simplicity than soundness of sense, or accuracy of logic, that according to the nature of things, and the physical structure of the universe, exactly *four* Gospels,* neither more nor less, were to be expected. We may smile at the weakness of the argument, but it leaves us no room to doubt that he considered that portion of revelation, as at all events incapable of further addition. It should be added, that in his frequent quotations from other portions of the Books of the New Testament, his appeal appears always to be made in a spirit of complete and implicit deference to what he had been taught to consider conclusive as an infallible rule of faith.

But Irenæus does not stand alone in this view of the case. Take the Apostolical Fathers from their very earliest commencement, and I have no hesitation in asserting that written Scripture, and not oral Tradition, will be found to have supplied the whole subject matter of their doctrinal teaching. Begin in the first place with the oldest of the uninspired Christian writers, Clemens Romanus. It is well known that the epistle which was transmitted from Rome, in his name, was

* "Neque enim plura numero quam hæc sunt, neque rursus pauciora capit esse Evangelia. Quoniam enim quatuor regiones mundi sunt in quo sumus, et quatuor principales spiritus, et disseminata est Ecclesia super omnem terram, columna autem et firmamentum Ecclesiæ est Evangelium, et spiritus vitæ; consequens est quatuor habere eam columnas, undique flantes incorruptibilitatem, et vivificantes homines," &c. *Adversus Hæres.* lib. 3. cap. 11.

addressed to the members of the Church of Corinth, in consequence of certain disputes, and a spirit of insubordination which had grown up in that community, and which Clemens, as an influential personage in the Christian commonwealth, was called upon to appease. Now, then, what are the principles and doctrines contained in the first of his two letters, which is the one respecting the authenticity of which no doubt has ever existed? They are simply these. He exhorts the Corinthian Church to mutual Christian love, and submission to legitimate authority, by those natural arguments of sound sense and piety, which any other good man in his situation might have been expected to use. He reminds them more especially of their former turbulence under the paternal rule of the apostle Paul, and strongly enforces his arguments on the side of peace, by large extracts from his writings; particularly from the Epistle to the Hebrews; and also by sundry quotations from the Old Testament. But from first to last, through the whole of this truly Christian exhortation, there occurs not one single word, implying any groundwork whatever for authoritative inculcation of doctrine, beyond the limits of inspired Scripture. No allusion, direct or incidental, is to be found to any one element of Christian faith still floating in a state of mere oral teaching, and not yet secured and rendered at once permanent and free from misapprehension, by being committed carefully to writing. In passing onward from the works of the inspired Apostles, to this the most ancient of their uninspired successors, we find ourselves still, as it were, breathing the same pure atmosphere with the first founders of our faith, and surrounded by the same identical objects and associations. None of those caprices and imaginary refinements which, as time advances, so naturally and almost necessarily obtrude themselves into

the speculations of theologians, appear as yet to have had their beginning. We still recognize evangelical truth in its simple and unostentatious attire. We can discover not the smallest trace of the affectation of novelty, or of an attempt to put old and received truths in a new and more attractive position. We meet here not the slightest symptom of that spirit which prevailed in later times, of withholding from the multitude what were assumed to be the esoteric doctrines of our faith, which, under the name of the "*disciplina arcani*," considered the breasts of the priesthood, and not the universally accessible page of revelation, the authorized storehouse of divine knowledge. He wrote like St. Paul, and not the less so, because he added nothing to what Paul had already taught; and with one or two trifling exceptions, which merely show that his pen was not guided by infallible inspiration, his writings would not, perhaps, be unworthy of that Apostle.

The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, which comes next in order of time among the works of the primitive Fathers, is again, like that of Clemens, in all respects a close imitation of the manner and sentiments of St. Paul. The allusions which it contains to that Apostle's writings, more particularly to the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, are numerous; in addition to which, references are also made in it from time to time to passages in the four Gospels, which are quoted with all the unsuspecting confidence of a mind acknowledging them as portions of a Divine Revelation. But here, as in the former case, not one word occurs, not the slightest hint or intimation is given, which denotes the existence of any matter of faith not included in, and especially recorded by, the sacred writings. "The blessed and renowned Paul," he says, "did with all exactness and soundness teach the words of truth; and,

being gone from you, wrote an epistle to you, *into which, if you look, you will be able to edify yourselves in the faith which has been delivered unto you*; which is the mother of us all: being followed with hope, and led on by a general love both towards God and towards Christ, and towards our neighbour. *For if any man has these things, he has fulfilled the law of righteousness.*" Surely these are not the expressions of a man who looked upon the apostolical writings as containing an incomplete summary of the Divine Will, and requiring to be helped out, and made complete by incidental gleanings from the verbal communications of intermediate teachers.

The Epistles of Ignatius, which are nearly contemporary with that of Polycarp, mark the anxiety of a good and pious mind distressed by the increasing prevalence of those heresies, the Judaizing and the Gnostic, which at so early a period assailed the Christian Church, and are little more than earnest appeals to the respective parties whom he addresses, to return to what they find *written*; to submit in brotherly affection to that graduated rule of Church government established by the Apostles; and to use, what he styles, "none but *Christian nourishment*, abstaining from pasture which is of another kind: that is to say, heresy. For they that are heretics," says he, "confound together the doctrine of Jesus Christ with their own poison; whilst they seem worthy of belief; as men give a deadly potion mixed with sweet wine, which he who is ignorant of does with the treacherous pleasure sweetly drink in his own death." This language again, to say the least of it, is certainly not that of a man who thinks that the recorded words of Scripture can be safely added to from the mere conjectures, however plausible, of uninspired human ingenuity. It is needless to add

that he is totally silent on the subject of tradition as a rule of faith.

The relation of the respective martyrdoms of Ignatius and Polycarp come next in turn for our consideration among the records of the age immediately following that of the Apostles. As authentic narratives of two most important events in the early history of the Church, they must be read by all Christians with sentiments of the deepest interest. But the abundant stores of spiritual edification which they afford, is not the subject of our present discussion. All that I need observe of them on this occasion is, that there is not to be found in them one single expression having reference to the existence of a double standard of faith, or setting up tradition as auxiliary to revelation.

The writings of Justin Martyr, the next in the order of the primitive writers, bring us down to a considerably later period; namely, to about the middle of the second century of the Christian era. In the works of this Father, quotations from the Canonical books of the New Testament meet us almost in every page; all of them substantially correct as conveying to us the exact sentiments, and often the very words of the inspired penmen; but still expressed occasionally with a degree of latitude which appears to denote citations from memory rather than that verbal accuracy, which in a more critical and refined age would necessarily accompany every reference to the inspired volume. Nothing, however, can be more certain than the fact, that it is in Scripture, and Scripture alone, that, according to the sentiments of this writer, we are to find the whole substance and foundation of our religious belief. No distinction is to be discovered in his writings between exoteric and esoteric teaching; no assertion of an exclusive right vested in any particular order of men for the

authoritative interpretation of the word of God; no reference to the oral communications of the Apostles as opposed to what they left recorded in writing for the edification of the Church; no one hint, in short, that a single dogma, obligatory upon the consciences of believers, exists, not recorded in and identified with the revealed Scriptures. "On the day which is called Sunday," says he, "an assembly of the believers through town and country takes place upon some common spot, when the writings of the Apostles, or the books of the Prophets, are publicly read, so long as the time allows, after which the presiding minister in a sermon exhorts his hearers to the practical adoption of the good precepts which they have thus heard recited."* In this short account we might fancy that we are reading a description of the mode of performing divine worship in any modern Protestant congregation. Certain it is, that nothing occurs either here or in any other portion of the writings of this Father, which denotes a rule of faith looking unsteadily from Scripture to tradition,† and adapting that which is found expressly written, to those additional doctrines, which have floated down from age to age through the channel of catechetical teaching.

* Apol. i. c. 67.

† Although throughout the whole of this work the word "tradition" is used in its usual modern acceptance, as implying *oral*, as opposed to *scriptural* teaching, still the reader should bear in mind that the expression "Traditio," or "Traditio Apostolica" as used in the early Christian writers, is frequently applied by them to the inspired writings themselves. Thus we find in the 73d Epistle in the correspondence of Cyprian, the use of it in this latter sense. "Si ergo, aut in *Evangelio* præcipitur, aut in *Apostolorum Epistolis vel Actibus* continetur ut a quacunque hæresi venientes non baptizentur, sed tantum manus illis imponatur in penitentiam, observetur *divina hæc et sancta traditio*." It is obvious therefore that where tradition is spoken of in the works of the early Fathers as possessed of authority in matters of faith, it is not therefore to be assumed as a matter of course, that a sanction to merely oral instruction is thereby intended.

In the commencement of these observations I have already referred to the sentiments of Irenæus, the contemporary of Justin, on this same subject. And thus, then, through this scanty series of writers, we descend through more than the first 150 years from the close of our Lord's ministry. Now during this long period, I repeat, we have every reason for believing that the doctrine of tradition being concurrent in authority with Scripture, or obligatory on the conscience, (in any degree beyond that in which the established usages of any set of good men must necessarily come with a certain recommendation in their favour to other well-disposed persons,) had never for a moment suggested itself to mankind. And yet most assuredly, if tradition has any claim to the sacred character which some modern writers would attach to it, it must have been during this very interval, that its accuracy must have been tested by the sifting of evidence, and the doctrines involved in it recorded in some distinct and palpable form, for the benefit of future ages. If tradition mean any thing as a rule of faith, it must of course mean *apostolical* tradition. It must come into actual contact with, it must descend in unbroken continuity from, the æra of direct inspiration, or it is nearly, if not utterly valueless. The opinions of the writers of the third or fourth centuries, unless they can be traced upwards through the earlier channel of Church history, necessarily carry with them no more weight of authority than might be claimed just as confidently in support of his own peculiar views by any theological speculatist of the present day. I am not indeed prepared to say, that although during this early period the authority of tradition had never been theoretically acknowledged, its practical influence had not in some degree (stealthily indeed and unconsciously to the parties adopting it)

begun already to make itself felt. This is, however, only what was to have been expected from the admitted circumstances of human nature. Man is so necessarily an imitator of his fellow-man, that it is impossible for any set of human beings to associate much with one another, without gradually adopting the various shades of each other's opinions. In no case is this more certain to occur than in that of religion. All men look anxiously and tremblingly towards the unknown world; all have their various private speculations as to the best mode of pleasing God and averting his just judgments. The interests of eternity are too important a stake, not to call into action every suggestion of the imagination, all the dreams of an alarmed fancy, no less than the deliberate inferences of a sound understanding. The more delicate and susceptible the conscience, the more operative of course are these feelings, and the more likely to break out into eccentric modes of action. The only really efficient check to the discursive and fanciful schemes of righteousness which these natural sentiments suggest, is the possession of that very blessing which we believe that Divine Providence has in its mercy afforded to us, namely, a written and inspired rule of faith, in which all that we are called upon to do, all which our Maker really requires of us, is specially and expressly recorded. But even this barrier will not always be effectual against the timid suggestions of our own anxious and scrupulous view of divine things. It is no easy matter for erring and sinful man to persuade himself that he has so merciful a Creator and Judge as revelation declares the Almighty to be. "Let me fall into the hands of God, and not into the hands of man," were the words of David when he had to choose between the alternative of punishment set before him. And the conclusion was a just one. But not so

reasons the world at large. A wounded conscience is naturally timid. Men accordingly invest God with human feelings and passions, and will not be persuaded that sacrifices which He has himself declared that He does not require, are not indispensable portions of their duty and service towards Him.

I have made these observations merely for the purpose of remarking, that although during that early period of the Church, to which I have thus far alluded, Scripture, and Scripture only, was the openly acknowledged rule of faith, still we are not to be surprised if we find during the same period the practice of the early Christians gradually and imperceptibly gliding into sentiments and usages not strictly in accordance with what they found written, and thus unsuspectingly setting the first example, which subsequent generations so fearfully enlarged upon, of setting up the commandments of men in rivalry to the revelations of God. The evil to which I allude was, indeed, during the two first centuries of the Christian era, comparatively slight; yet from the moment that the book of revelation closed, or rather before it closed, the first symptoms of the darkening of the theological atmosphere may be faintly traced, which, as time advanced, gradually thickened into the deepest night. But on these points, I shall have occasion to dilate more at large in a later portion of these remarks.

Before I proceed further, let me make a few observations on what I have always conceived to be the great leading principle of Protestantism; namely, "the entire sufficiency of Scripture, independently of tradition, as a rule of faith and doctrine."

Now the very fact that the whole Christian world is agreed as to the reality of the inspiration of the writers of the New as well as of the Old Testament, appears to

me, I own, conclusive as to the correctness of the inference, which it is my object to advocate. That the Almighty should have supplied miraculous aid to enable certain human beings to perpetuate, in writing, an infallible record of his will, seems at once sufficient to establish the assumption that such a record must be complete in all important particulars. Where is our security from error, even in the study of the Scriptures themselves, if they afford only a partial view of the Divine dealings with mankind; and if we are still left to trace out through the dizzy mazes of conjecture and orally transmitted doctrines, facts, without the aid of which the inspired writings would remain either vaguely inconclusive or hopelessly obscure? I am aware, indeed, that the existence of the Church was prior, in point of time, to that of the apostolical writings. True, also, it is, that the first preachers of Christianity necessarily communicated their doctrines by oral teaching; but does it therefore follow, (is it indeed for a moment to be believed?) that when they did proceed to fix in writing, for the benefit of after-ages, those selfsame doctrines, they after all made only a partial selection of a few general principles? that they omitted to embody in that record the whole counsel and revealed will of God? or even, if we can imagine them to have been so unwisely disposed, can we believe that the Holy Spirit which guided their pens, would have thus left its own work thus incomplete?*

* An argument attempting to prove the incompleteness of our present canon of Scripture, has been occasionally adduced from the assumed fact that an Epistle of St. Paul to the Church of Laodicea (supposed to be alluded to in Chap. iv. ver. 17, of the Epistle to the Colossians) is now lost. In reality, however, there is no ground whatever for supposing that any writing such as that alluded to, was ever in existence. St. Paul's reference is not to an Epistle addressed by him to the Church in Laodicea, but to a communication received by him from Laodicea, ἐκ Λαοδικείας, probably containing interrogatories respecting spiritual matters similar to those which we know him to have received from the Church established at Corinth.

But let Scripture speak for itself. We all have the book in our possession. We all know the amount of our own spiritual wants, and the degree of information, of counsel, and of moral strength which that book is calculated to afford. Let us ask our own hearts and our own experience, "Has it left its work half done?" Is any thing by which we can really promote God's honour and service left unnoticed and unrecommended by it? If Christianity is, indeed, what Christ has declared it to be, the worship of God *in spirit and in truth*, and not a mere system of *external ordinances*, are the sacred writings, such as we find them, chargeable with any defects or omissions, which disqualify them from effecting this their declared object, to the greatest possible degree? Let us, for the purpose of answering these questions, state, in as few words as the subject will permit, what doctrines the inspired volume, independently of all human traditions whatever, does avowedly contain. In putting the case thus, of course I mean by "the Inspired Volume" those writings which are by general agreement deemed *canonical*, the text of which has undergone the ordeal of sound criticism; and I am also assuming the context to be taken, without reference to sects or parties, in its *plainest and most grammatical sense*.

Taking then the word Scripture under this definition, and deriving our inferences respecting its purport from the unsophisticated meaning of its language, and not from the captious renderings of interested and prejudiced partisans, we can, I think, assert positively that the Bible does contain the following doctrines. In the first place, the Old Testament having laid down the great primary position of the moral corruption of our nature, proceeds to show how, in the case of the single nation of the Jews, God so far interfered with the natural course of events as to place in the hands of that people

a perfect rule of life, accompanied by a system of ritual ordinances, for the expiation of such sins of omission and commission as might naturally be expected to result from the admitted infirmity of the human agent, when subjected to a trial confessedly above his strength. These expiatory observances, however, though established by the Almighty Himself, are still spoken of by the selfsame Scriptures as imperfect in the following particulars: in their application they were adapted to one single nation only; in their operation upon social life, they were cumbrous and inconvenient in their details; and even with regard to their moral tendency, the righteousness they led to was rather that of ceremonial obedience than the spiritual worship of the heart. They were professedly a provisional arrangement for a definite period, and for the use of a far from advanced people. The prophetic books of the Old Testament accordingly anticipate the approach of an infinitely more fortunate period. The distinction between Jew and Gentile was one day to be removed; ritual observances were to cease, and internal holiness to be effectually cultivated: the typical sacrifices of bulls and of goats were to be done away, and one great sacrifice for sin was to be made. God was to be reconciled to the whole human race, and that reconciliation was to be a free gift to all of every nation, who should ask for it. "Ho! every one that thirsteth," was their language, "come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat: yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."* It would be quite superfluous to detail other passages to the same purport. They occur again and again throughout the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Now it cannot be denied

* Isaiah lv. 1.

that the covenant of the New Testament, as we find it in the writings of the Apostles and Evangelists, exactly realizes this description. It was announced at its first commencement as a system from which was to redound glory to God, and peace and goodwill to mankind. Its leading characteristic, (and, when we recollect the cloud of gloom which the timid superstitions of mankind have thrown over this singularly merciful dispensation, the circumstance cannot be too repeatedly noticed,) its leading characteristic is declared to be, that it is not a religion of external ceremonies, but of inward righteousness. Its attention is not directed to a tissue of minute details and intricate forms, but to grand and simple views of the one great process of reconciliation between God and man.

Such are the features of the Gospel dispensation as traced by Scripture, with a clearness and precision which it is impossible to mistake. Nor are the expressions of revelation less explicit, when speaking of the Divine Author of our faith. The four Gospels, without indulging a profane curiosity, set before us every particular respecting his person and ministry with which it behoves us to be acquainted. His character, office, doctrine, and mode of teaching, are graphically and minutely described from his coming into the world as a child, to his departure from it in glory. If language has any meaning, he is distinctly declared to be God, and yet distinct from God the Father; on the other hand, he is as unequivocally declared to have borne for a season all the infirmities of our flesh, sin alone excepted. Again, the personality of the Holy Spirit is distinctly asserted; and yet that Divine Person is as clearly declared to be identified neither with the Father nor the Son. In combination with these explicit statements, the strict unity of the Godhead is also

positively asserted. Human reason may be startled at these seemingly contradictory positions, *but there they are*; Scripture declares them to be true, and we must either reject Scripture as inspired, or accept them as we find them. And yet, (the moment that we take a practical view of the question,) from these mysterious doctrines flows, in direct and obvious inference, the most lovely and effective moral code which the human heart can conceive, or desire. God reconciled, and man's fallen nature restored. The sinner spared, yet sin denounced and punished. God condescending to man, and man, with awakened spiritual feelings, approximating to God. Humility in a man's estimate of himself; kindness and charity thence resulting towards the whole human race. Faith, which, throwing itself at the Saviour's cross, disclaims all good works of its own: good works on the other hand which pullulate and grow up of themselves in the regenerate heart in consequence of that very disclaimer. Justification, in short, the cause: sanctification the result. Such, in a few words, are the leading doctrines of the New Testament. Nor yet has the same revelation been silent as to the means by which those doctrines are, in conformity with the wants and constitution of human nature, to assume the external form and substance of a visible religion. God is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth; but ordinances in some form or other, in our present state of existence, are necessary for the renovation of our habits of holiness, and to prevent our faith from becoming too thin and impalpable for our practice. Our Saviour has accordingly ordained two solemn institutions; the one, that of baptism or of regeneration, by which every person initiated into this covenant enters into that course of spiritual obedience, which, if duly performed, is little less than the adoption of a new

and a better nature: the other, the Eucharistic commemoration of his death, by which we are feelingly reminded of the vast price which has been paid for our salvation, our self-humiliation and gratitude are awakened, and we become as it were spiritually identified with him whose typical body and blood we receive under the elements of bread and wine. Again, we are required to be frequent in the assembling of ourselves together for the purposes of public prayer; and in order that on these occasions every thing may be done in a seemly manner, a graduated scale of ecclesiastical rulers has been established, originally Apostles and Elders, latterly Apostles, Elders, and Deacons, for the instruction and government of the laity in spiritual matters, and for the administration of the ceremonials of divine worship.

Now thus much, I repeat, we find clearly stated and enacted in Scripture. I am not, as I before hinted, going to argue the matter with those persons who, denying the authenticity of this or that part of the commonly supposed canonical writings, or wresting words from their ordinary import, would get rid of important points of doctrine, or deny the Apostolical origin of our Church discipline. I merely say, as I have already said, that the New Testament, if fairly construed according to the obvious meaning of its language, unequivocally lays down all the doctrines which I have above stated. If, however, notwithstanding, men still exist, so unwilling to accept what we conceive to be the orthodox faith, that they will mistranslate or omit important passages rather than swerve from their own preconceived opinions, of such men it can be no want of fairness or of charity to assert, that the fault lies, not in the obscurity of revelation, but in their own wilfulness. To attempt to recall such persons to the right path, by

calling in the aid of tradition to reinforce Scripture, will obviously be an unprofitable toil. If the written Word will admit of sophistical misinterpretation, much more so will the unwritten. If they object to the unbending rule of steel as not sufficiently accurate, they will not readily be persuaded to adopt the pliant and uncertain rule of lead as its substitute.

Taking, then, the Holy Scriptures according to the hasty sketch which I have given of them, do they, I ask, betray any one symptom of incompleteness? Do they, or do they not, contain a system, a treasury, of spiritual knowledge, entire and symmetrical in all its parts? Is there any one portion of man's moral discipline on earth, any branch of his social duties, any rule for his practical worship of and approximation to his God, which is there left undeveloped and unexplained? I own I am at a loss to conjecture what additions or improvements on these points we can imagine or desire. The religion of Christ, we must recollect (that worship of God which is in spirit and truth,) consists not so much of details as of principles and of motives. It makes the root good, and takes for granted that the fruit will respond in quality to the nature of the stock from which it grows. Such was the view taken of it by our Lord himself when He summed up the whole of our duty to God and man into two simple and stringent rules. Such, again, was the view entertained by St. Paul, when he declared that the whole sum and substance of the Gospel which he preached was but the expansion, and following up into all its legitimate details, of one single principle. "I determined not to know any thing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Corinthians ii. 2.) Human nature must be a very different thing from what it is in general supposed to be, if, in its course of spiritual discipline, it has

to look out for other and more efficient rules and motives for holiness than those which are comprehended in the doctrines now referred to. And are we then lightly to throw a slur upon a rule of life thus seemingly perfect and symmetrical? Does no heavy responsibility attach to the attempt to remove the structure of our faith from its original sound and substantial foundation, and to rest it henceforward upon the basis of human inventions? Is it a small affront to God's best gift to mankind to assert of it that it is indeed true, but true only up to a certain point; and that its deficiencies must be helped out by surmises and cullings of presumed traditional opinions, for the authenticity of which we have no warrant beyond our own vague conjecture?

But, say the advocates for tradition, it is no charge to bring against Scripture to say of it that it does not perform more than the strict object for which it was written. The books of the New Testament were composed for the use of men who had already embraced the Christian doctrines; and therefore it would be requiring too much of them to expect that they should lay down fundamental principles which had already been assented to by those to whom they are addressed, or should launch out into details which had already been forestalled by the oral teaching of the Apostles. If this view of the question be correct, the entireness and completeness of Scripture, as a rule of faith, must, as they assert, be necessarily abandoned; and the only resource accordingly remaining to us is to fill up its inevitable omissions by those gleanings of primitive tradition which the course of eighteen centuries has spared.

Now I deny, as I have already observed, the necessity of this conclusion. I assert, on the contrary, that there is an "à priori" improbability against divine inspiration having been afforded to an incomplete Scripture; I

assert also, that it is naturally to be assumed that the Apostles, when they did proceed to place their doctrines upon paper, would at all events be careful to omit nothing which they deemed necessary to the salvation of their readers. But admit, for argument's sake, the contrary supposition. Grant that the main teaching of the founders of our faith lay in oral instruction, and that their written works are merely a kind of *πάρεργα*, mere incidental allusion to doctrines stated elsewhere. What then, I ask, follows as a necessary consequence? Why this unsatisfactory and mortifying conclusion; that as the original record has at all events not come down to our time, the revelation of God's will, which we now possess, is necessarily incomplete. We actually know not at this moment the whole of our religion: what it has been, and should be. For surely it were the merest gratuitous assumption, not only unsupported, but positively contradicted by all the testimony of history, to assert that the oral instruction of the apostolical ages has been transmitted to our times in any thing like purity, or as capable of identification, through all the thousand heresies of eighteen hundred years, or the almost total extinction of Christian knowledge which prevailed over the whole of Europe, before the æra of the Protestant Reformation. Look at the history of the middle ages of Europe, and ask where were the pure traditions of the Church to be found in that period of ignorance and superstition? In the days of Innocent the Third, or the still more ravolting æra of Alexander the Sixth? I have now lying before me a Spanish edition of the "Hours of the Blessed Virgin," without date, but certainly printed during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. The very first leaf contains five short prayers, directed to be said before the image of St. Gregory; for every single performance of which, with the accom-

paniment of five Paternosters, and five Ave Marias, a promise of no less than 46,000 years of pardon is held out by no less authority than that of Paul Second, the pontiff of that period. Where, I ask, was the tradition of the Church at that moment, when the credulity of all Europe could bear to be thus insulted by monstrous and antichristian fictions? If the question be put, where then was true Christianity to be found in that darkened epoch, the answer is obvious: in Scripture and in Scripture only. To the return to Scripture as the great rule of faith, Christianity a few years after that time owed its revival, and to our continual adherence to what we find written, with the exclusion of all merely human surmises, it is, that we are indebted for all our modern advances in theological knowledge.

We have, I repeat, no escape from this dilemma. Either revelation, supposing it to have originally consisted of the written Scriptures and of oral tradition, is at this moment incomplete, the oral communication having been lost in the lapse of ages, and the supplementary written portion alone having descended to us; or, on the other hand, we must be prepared to receive the canonical books of the New Testament as an entire, full, and sufficient declaration of the will of God and summary of our faith. That the latter inference is the true one has already been attempted to be shown by arguments taken from the internal evidences of the written Scriptures. This inference, however, will appear still more prominent, if we consider the very weak foundations upon which those arguments rest, which are usually alleged in support of the authority of tradition, as constituting an integral portion of the Christian revelation. Those arguments it shall now be my object to examine.

Now it is self-evident, that if the written Scriptures

do carry with them strong proofs of their own Divine inspiration, the claim of any merely oral communications (even supposing them to be really traceable to the very earliest ages of Christianity,) to be placed on the same level with the written word of God, would require to be supported by the strongest possible external testimony, before we could accept them as such. To say of any traditionary doctrines, conveyed in no definite form of words, but passing from mouth to mouth, under every possible modification of expression, which the personal feelings and wishes of the reporters may lead them to adopt—to assert, I say of them, that they *are revelation*, and that they are equally binding upon the belief and conscience with the Holy Scriptures (and such are the assertions which now-a-days we hear, even within the pale of our own Church), is surely a most startling proposition. But the fact is, that all the evidence attempted to be adduced in favour of this theory, is of a most questionable kind. Nothing assuredly can be more unsteady, or more at variance with one another, than the floating opinions of mankind on all grave and important subjects, that of religion more especially, when not rendered consistent and uniform by being compressed into a dogmatical form, and enunciated in definite language. What is wanted on such an occasion is some clear and authoritative record to which all may unhesitatingly look, and from the decisive cogency of which there lies no appeal. Without such an aid to give steadiness and fixedness to their views, the more earnestly and deeply that, under such circumstances, men think and feel on this important topic, the more certainly will they deviate into the extravagances of an excited judgment. The very best intentions, so far from affording them security, will often help to mislead. The weak-minded, the superstitious, and the ignorant become, in questions of

faith, as dangerous guides as the hypocrite and impostor. False views and estimates of the divine attributes grow up in moments of excitement or terror; strange conceits for the obtaining God's favour, or for averting his wrath, grow successively into fashion, and divide mankind into sects, till the passions become heated to the verge of delirium, and men begin to defend from theory dogmas, which they had originally adopted from mere impulse. Such is the origin of not a few religious sects—such the source of many of those traditionary notions which subsequent times have consecrated, and to which the circumstance of their antiquity has eventually attached a sentiment of deep veneration. Happy then, most happy is it, that meanwhile the written word of God undergoes no change, and by the permanence of its records, and the calmness of its precepts, enables the sincere inquirer after truth to subdue his extravagances, to elevate his deficiencies to a more perfect standard, and yet whilst he feels warmly, to think at the same time soberly and wisely. Without the operation of one continued miracle, in the absence of a *written* revelation, it were impossible to guard any set of human beings, however well-intentioned, from errors such as I am now describing. And as no continued miracle has ever been alleged, as having guarded the minds of the successive Christian generations from these easily besetting fallacies, I know not why we should shrink from at once asserting the real truth, and stating explicitly what are, and what are not, the true foundations on which alone we are to rest our eternal hopes.

In the early part of these remarks I took a hasty survey of the writings of the primitive Fathers, for the first 180 years of the Christian æra. I there attempted to show that those good and single-minded men acknowledged no standard of faith, excepting that comprehended

in the written Scriptures, but at the same time I hinted, that practical deviations from the purity and soundness of the Christian doctrines had become, even in that simple age, slightly perceptible; and that those deviations, continually added to by the innovations of after-ages, were in fact the forerunners of popery, in its worst and darkest form. It shall now be my endeavour to show more in detail the gradual process of that accumulation of human inventions, which in the course of time effected so entire a change in the character of Christianity. In doing this, I shall fortunately have to point out, not any moral defects, but solely the errors and ignorances of good, but not always well judging men. At the same time, it will be my object to demonstrate that the primitive ages of Christianity, after the close of the apostolical period, did not possess those peculiar advantages for arriving at divine truth, which, at the present day, we are so apt to suppose.

It is a fallacious argument which would urge their nearness in time to the age of the Apostles, as a proof that no mistakes of importance could be fallen into by the early Christians. Traditional truth, among imperfectly educated persons, does not pass from mouth to mouth, with that accuracy and certainty, even during a very limited period of time, which we are inclined to imagine. On the contrary, in an age when knowledge circulates slowly, and the collisions of well informed minds with each other are comparatively rare, (and such was the period now alluded to,) it is surprising how many erroneous opinions, well intentioned, perhaps, but not therefore the less dangerous, may grow up within the space of a very few years. When the short season of actual contact is gone by, mere proximity or indefinite remoteness of time make, in fact, little or no difference in the degrees of evidence, which historical events are

capable of receiving from the labours of literary men. A manuscript, for instance, of the gospels of the date of the fourth or fifth centuries, is as complete a record at this moment, as it was on the day in which it was written; and, if preserved two thousand years longer, will be as completely so to future generations, as it is to the present. A well informed historian at this moment has a far more accurate knowledge of the events connected with the Norman conquest, than was possessed by nine-tenths of the villagers of this country, who lived at that period. And yet it is upon this very fallacious, though plausible assumption, that knowledge must necessarily grow clearer and more certain in exact proportion as we approach to the fountain, that the argument in favour of tradition almost exclusively rests.

Why, one is naturally impelled to ask, should the primitive ages have possessed a privilege which our own times have not, of escaping one of the most besetting infirmities of human nature, and of transmitting unmixed truth orally from one generation to another, without any taint or superaddition of mere human speculation? If, with the preservative restraint of a written revelation, our own age has launched forth into extreme notions with scarcely any common centre in which to agree, why are we to measure the simple and unsuspecting Fathers of the primitive Church by a different rule, and argue that, because they meant well, therefore divine truth orally transmitted, must necessarily have passed from them pure and unaltered? Dr. Middleton has observed, that learned men have reckoned about ninety different heresies, which all sprang up within the first three centuries. "Who knows not," says Bishop Jewell, "what a number of heresies arose when the Gospel was first propagated in the world, in the times of the very Apostles? Who before those

times ever heard of Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, Carpocrates, Cerinthus, Ebion, Valentinus, Secundus, Marcosius, Colorbasius, Heracleo, Lucian, and Severus? But why should I mention this contemptible number? Epiphanius reckons eighty, and Augustine more, distinct heresies which grew up with the gospel. What then? Was not the gospel the gospel, because together with it so many heresies were produced?"* That the Holy Scriptures should have existed unaltered through the whole of that disturbed period, and "like a light shining in a dark place," should have served to check, in some degree, the eccentricities of human speculation, and to direct men's footsteps in the midst of so many conflicting opinions, we can well believe, and must feel thankful, that such no doubt was the case. But that person must have much more confidence in the general good sense and judgment of mankind than I am disposed to feel, who can suppose the oral communications of those successive ages to have descended to us equally pure; and yet, unless we admit them to have so descended, the whole argument which would set up their authority as equivalent to Scripture, falls of course at once to the ground.

Justin and Irenæus, we are told, flourished within the space of about 150 years from the close of our Lord's ministry, and, therefore, their authority on points of doctrine must be far superior to that of the best informed theologians of the present day. Without wishing to assert any thing bordering upon paradox, I must again repeat, I doubt the justice of the inference. In their time truth made its way slowly, and with diffi-

* And yet there are writers of the present day, who, in order to enforce their theory of the authoritative teaching of the Church, assert the unanimity of doctrine, which, according to them, characterized the Christian community during the first four centuries.

culty, through comparatively isolated districts, unaided by that general spread of knowledge, that enlightened criticism, and that corrective good sense, resulting from an almost universal education, which is in our own day the great security against the growth of unsound and eccentric opinions. And yet, even under all these advantages possessed by ourselves, what has been the succession of sect upon sect, which has marked a period of the same duration, namely, the last 150 years in this country, from the nonjurors of the revolution in 1688, to the Irvingites and United Brethren of the reign of William the Fourth! In both periods men have existed anxious only for the truth, but who have been misled by the warmth of their imaginations, or their want of the powers of due discrimination. We may accordingly respect their piety, and be desirous of imitating their virtues; but we are plainly outraging common sense, when on the strength of these qualities, we proceed to assert, either in one case or the other, their emancipation from error.

We have a singular proof in the extract given by Irenæus from the writings of Papius, in how very short a period original truth, passing through a few hands in the form of tradition, may be transmuted into the most portentous absurdity. Papius, it should be remembered, was Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, and flourished about 90 years after our Saviour's ascension. Of course he might in his youth have conversed with persons capable of having been actual eye-witnesses of the events recorded in the Gospels. We are told that the object of his book respecting the life and conversations of our Lord was to rescue from oblivion such floating incidents, connected with that period, as might otherwise be lost if left to mere oral tradition. Let us now, then, observe how he has succeeded. We have St.

John's inspired record of our Saviour's valedictory words addressed to his disciples, containing promises of his future protection of his Church; and we have also Papius's report of a similar assurance of blessings to be communicated to his followers in the consummation of his heavenly kingdom. Let us then place them in parallel columns, and observe in what degree they agree with each other.

SCRIPTURE.

John xvii.

THESE words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou

TRADITION.

As the Elders remember, who saw John the disciple of the Lord, that they heard from him what the Lord taught about those times, and said, "The days shall come in which vines shall exist, each containing 10,000 shoots, and in each shoot shall be 10,000 arms, and in every true shoot shall be 10,000 branches, and on every branch 10,000 clusters, and in every cluster 10,000 grapes, and every grape when pressed shall give 25 firkins of wine, and when any one of the Saints shall proceed to gather a cluster, some other cluster shall exclaim, "I am a better cluster, take me, and bless the Lord through me." In like manner a

SCRIPTURE.

gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine: and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we *are*. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that

TRADITION.

single grain of wheat shall produce 10,000 ears, and each ear shall produce 10,000 grains, and every grain shall afford 10 pounds weight of fine pure flour; and all the other fruits and grains and herbs shall abound in the same proportion, and also all animals feeding upon those kinds of food which spring from the earth, shall be tame and loving to one another, and in all things subject to the accommodation of man.

He added also, these things are credible to the true believers. And Judas the traitor, not believing this account, and asking him "In what way shall all these productions be brought about by the Lord?" our Lord replied, "Those persons shall see them who shall partake of them." It was in anticipation of these times that Isaiah prophesied saying, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb," &c.

SCRIPTURE.

the Scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe

SCRIPTURE.

that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou has sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare *it*: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

It were to insult the common sense and understanding of my readers, were I to stop to point out the entire dissimilarity between the awful and thrilling sentiments contained in the former of these quotations, and the

trifling childishness of the latter. And yet as I have already remarked scarcely a longer interval elapsed than that of a single human life, between the period of the earthly ministry of Him who spake as never man spake, and the time when Papius was treasuring up this wretched specimen of tradition; a document more resembling in character a page transcribed at random from the Koran, than representing the sublime simplicity and divine wisdom of the gospel.*

I make these remarks not for the purpose of depreciating the Scriptural attainments of the early Fathers of the Church, or of lowering their just authority, which will ever have its due weight in all well disposed and Christian minds, but merely to show that we must still judge of them as men, liable to error, and to be consi-

* Another passage, still extant, from the work of Papius affords a second remarkable instance of the strange absurdities which so early as the close of the first century, oral tradition was beginning to impose upon mankind as authentic verities. A belief, it seems, prevailed, in direct contradiction to the narrative in the book of the Acts, that Judas the traitor did not die by strangulation, nor by the effects of his fall, but that he lived sometime afterwards in a frightful state of disease, a walking instance of God's retributive vengeance. "Judas," says Papius, "walked about in this world a great example of the effects of impiety; being so much swollen in his body, that he could not find room to pass through an opening which a cart could easily be led through; and thus he was crushed by a cart, and his entrails squeezed out from his body." A subsequent variation of this story, which prevailed in the 4th century, adds to the above facts, amongst other particulars, the circumstance, that his *head* was so much swollen, as to exceed in dimensions the *size of a cart*, and that his eyes were in consequence so deeply sunk within the projecting flesh, that no optical instrument of the surgeon could render them visible. Πρησθεὶς ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον τὴν σάρκα, ὥστε μὴ δὲ ὀπόθεν ἄμαξα βαδῖως διέρχεται, ἐκείνον δύνασθαι διελθεῖν. Ἀλλὰ μὴ δὲ αὐτὸν μόνον τὸν τῆς κεφαλῆς ὄγκον αὐτοῦ. Τὰ μὲν γὰρ βλέφαρα τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ, φασί, τοσοῦτον ἐξοιδῆσαι, ὥς αὐτὸν μὲν καθόλου τὸ φῶς μὴ βλέπειν. Τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς δὲ αὐτοῦ μὴ δὲ ὑπὸ ἱατροῦ διόπτρας ὀφθῆναι δύνασθαι· τοσοῦτον βάθος εἶχον ἀπὸ τῆς ἐξωθεν ἐπιφωρείας. * * * * * Μετὰ πολλὰς δὲ βασάνους καὶ τιμωρίας, ἐν ἰδίῳ, φασί, χωρίῳ τελευτήσαντα, καὶ τοῖς ἐπὶ τῆς ὁδοῦ ἐρμηον καὶ ἀνοίκητον τὸ χωρίον μέχρι τῆς νῦν γενέσθαι· ἀλλ' οὐδὲ μέχρι τῆς σήμερον δύνασθαι τινα ἐκείνον τὸν τόπον παρελθεῖν, ἔαν μὴ τὰς βίνας ταῖς χειρσὶν ἐπιφράξῃ.

dered as speaking the words of infallible truth, only when they refer to those selfsame written records of the divine will, which, by God's blessing, have descended uncorrupted to ourselves. The fact is, that the moment that we compare the writings of the Apostles with those of the primitive Christian Fathers, we perceive at once that, in passing from the former to the latter, we have crossed the boundary of inspiration, and have to do henceforward with mere fallible human beings. One of the circumstances which strikes us as an internal evidence of the divine aid afforded to the apostolical writers, is the quiet, dispassionate, and sober manner in which they dwell upon those sublime or soul-harrowing truths which uninspired authors would not have been content to detail, without, at the same time, attempting either to paralyze us with terror, or to elevate us to the highest point of imaginative exaltation. Another of their characteristics, and a remarkable one it is, is their entire freedom from those mistakes with respect to physical facts, which, in an ill-informed age, a writer almost necessarily falls into, and which at once disprove his claims to infallibility. Now let the future advances of physical science be what they may, we may say with certainty that no fatal error with respect to natural facts ever will, or ever can be found in the writings of St. Paul or of St. Peter. And yet pass on but a single step further, and take up the Epistle of Clemens Romanus, and we find that good and really enlightened man, not merely illustrating the Christian doctrine of the resurrection by the legend of the phoenix, but absolutely asserting the existence of that fabulous bird as an established fact in natural history. Now it is true that this is undoubtedly a pardonable blunder. It was as gravely stated, at about the same period, as an established physical truth, by the strong-minded historian

Tacitus; and the belief in it certainly proves nothing whatever against the soundness of the doctrines, and the true Christian piety of the friend and companion of St. Paul. But then it is equally certain on the other hand, that a mis-statement of this description proves that the writer committing it was at all events not inspired; that opinions delivered by him, unless borne out by Scripture, must be received as human opinions only, and that traditions descending to us through such a channel can never be fairly set up in rivalry to, or as concurrent and equal with, the inspired writings of the Apostles. A remark of a similar character may be made with respect to the epistles of his immediate follower Ignatius. The unostentatious good sense in the recommendations of our Saviour and of his Apostle Paul to the early Christians, that they should not unnecessarily incur persecutions from the Jews or the heathen authorities, but should do what they could innocently to put their persons in security, is strongly characteristic of that calm practical wisdom which I have already alluded to as so singularly pervading the sacred writings. "When they persecute you in this city," said our Lord, "flee ye into another." (Matt. x. 23). "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without" (Coloss. iv. 5). "The Lord stood with me and strengthened me; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." (2 Tim. iv. 17). "In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me; and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands" (2 Cor. xi. 33), were the words of his chosen Apostle. Here we cannot but observe that exact medium between ostentatious rashness on the one hand, and a timid denial of the truth on the other, which marks the extreme of good sense, and which,

in a period of high excitement, we rarely, if ever, see realized. But up to this point was the age of inspiration. After the close of the apostolic period, the transition to a more showy, and, according to our carnal notions, a more attractive righteousness, began to manifest itself, slight indeed at first, but obviously the commencement of that exaggerated self-denying spirit so natural to the human mind when seeking to work out its own sanctification by the mortification of the body. It were surely impossible to mistake the following sentiments for those of St. Paul, or of any of the heaven-directed Apostles. "I beseech you," are the words of Ignatius to the Romans, deprecating their interference for the purpose of preventing his martyrdom, "that you show not an unseasonable good-will towards me. Suffer me to be food to the wild beasts, by whom I shall attain to God. Encourage the wild beasts, that they may become my sepulchre. May I enjoy the wild beasts that are prepared for me; which also I wish may exercise all their fierceness upon me,—and whom, for that end, I will encourage, that they may be sure to devour me, and not serve me as they have done some, whom out of fear they have not touched. But, if they will not do it willingly, I will provoke them to it." In these sentiments, however sincerely conceived, I repeat, we detect at one glance a deviation from the meek and unpretending spirit of the apostolical age. But as we recede further from the primitive times, this deviation becomes gradually still more perceptible. Upon turning to the writings of Justin Martyr, we at once perceive (conjointly, indeed, with abundance of sound and fervent piety,) a deficiency of judgment, and an absence of critical accuracy and sound sense in his expositions of Scripture, which at once appear to disqualify him from speaking with even the semblance of authority

upon mere traditional topics. He who knows not how to convey even a written message correctly, will scarcely speak with much weight when reporting solely from memory and from his own private impressions. But it is impossible to read the works of Justin without occasional feelings of astonishment at the strange inferences which he draws from Holy Writ; to say nothing of his verbal inaccuracies, which often appear to mark rather quotations made from memory, than to be references to the recorded text.* Take the following specimens of his inconclusive reasoning. What are we to think, for instance, of his deriving the prevalence of moral evil in later times from the influence of demons, the progeny of angels having commerce with the antediluvian females? of his discovering, as he imagines, a prophecy of our Lord's crucifixion in the expression, "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people" (Isaiah lxxv. 2); or more strangely still, in another passage of the same prophet, "the *government* (i. e., as he chooses to construe it, the *power of the cross*) shall be upon his shoulder"* (Isaiah ix. 6). Of his discovering the holy symbol of the cross in the masts of shipping, in the implements of husbandry, in the tools of the carpenter, and even in the position of the nose and eyebrows in the human face, and of his considering this

* This fondness for strained applications of texts of Scripture to events entirely unconnected with them, is by no means confined to Justin, but was common to most of the early Christian writers. The following texts are quoted by Cyprian, in addition to those given above, as prophetic of our Lord's crucifixion, with the same disregard to their original and obvious meaning.

"And thy life *shall hang* in doubt before thee, and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life."—Deuteronomy xxviii. 66.

"Let the lifting up of my hand be as an evening sacrifice."—Psalm cxli.

"I have called daily upon Thee: I have stretched out my hands unto Thee."—Psalm lxxxviii.

"God is not a man that he should lie, (i. e. *be in suspense*) neither the son of man that he should repent."—Numbers xxiii. 19.

last mentioned strange idea as actually alluded to in the words of Jeremiah, "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord" (Lamentations iv. 20). How, again, shall we defend the accuracy of his theological opinions, when we find him not only arguing in favour of the salvability of the holier heathens (a doctrine in which most Christians will probably agree with him), but even attempting to show that, inasmuch as our Lord was the *Λόγος*—the impersonation of the Divine wisdom; therefore, all persons possessed of any high degree of wisdom, such as Socrates and others, were actual Christians? I am far, very far, from urging that these, or the many other instances of unsound judgment or ignorance which are to be found in his writings ought to diminish our respect for a holy and single minded man, who proved the sincerity of his faith by laying down his life in its cause; but surely one may without censure withhold his confidence and assent, when called upon to accept, as a revelation from heaven, traditionary opinions or doctrines transmitted to us through such a channel.

I have already taken notice of the argument that the early Fathers, as approaching nearer than ourselves to the apostolical age, *must* be better judges than we can be of what is sound or unsound in theology; and I have assigned my reasons why I conceive this argument unsound. But, perhaps, if there are any points in which proximity of time would appear to give the primitive Christians an advantage over ourselves with respect to the means of better information, it would be those simple historical facts, unconnected with doctrine, which at least might naturally be supposed to descend unaltered through several successive generations. And yet, even upon these very points, at how comparatively early a period do we find traditional accuracy fail us! Ire-

næus was, we know, the disciple of Polycarp, who again was the disciple of St. John. Surely a plain, single, historical, circumstance, which had to pass through only two intermediate hands, may be supposed to have reached him unaltered. We can scarcely imagine a more direct channel of communication than that which must have conveyed to him the broad and obvious events of our Saviour's life. And yet we know that he has asserted (for no better reason, so far as we can understand, than for that of supporting a fanciful theory respecting the several divisions of human life, and of illustrating very unnecessarily a text in Scripture, (John viii. 57), that our Lord must have reached nearly the fiftieth year of his age at the time of his crucifixion;* in order to make out which circumstance, he gratuitously inserts, contrary to the express declaration of the four evangelists, a period of upwards of fifteen years between his baptism and the commencement of his ministry. Why, we may surely ask, should other more intricate and less palpable truths be supposed to descend to us unchanged, through a course of eighteen centuries, by mere oral transmission, if a person possessed of such means of arriving at the truth, flourishing within one hundred and fifty years of our Lord's crucifixion, could make so strange a mistake with regard to a simple event of mere history?

It being absolutely necessary, if we would attach any real authority to tradition, that we should prove its actual connexion with the apostolical age, it seems scarcely to be required that I should follow up this line of argument farther, if it has been already shown that between the close of the apostolic period and the death of Irenæus, not only no recorded sanction can be found

* *Adversus Hæres.* lib. ii. c. 39.

in favour of authoritative tradition, but that, on the contrary, from the obvious inaccuracies of the few writers of that time, a strong presumption is established against it. Still, however, it may be worth while to look onward a little further, if it is only to show that the subsequent course of time was quite in harmony with the preceding, and that the accumulation of human inventions in religion was a gradual process which did not at once attain to full maturity.

The period then which immediately followed the age of Irenæus was one in which those canons of sound criticism, the observance of which is so absolutely necessary for testing the accuracy of recorded facts, or the authenticity of written records, were little, if at all studied. Opinions capriciously assumed, and accepted by subsequent writers implicitly and without inquiry, were lightly transmitted from hand to hand, often in the selfsame words, or at all events, differing little in substance. Spurious productions also, bearing the names of primitive or of apostolical writers, began now to make their appearance, and for want of that quick-sightedness in works of literature, which none but a learned and studious people can ever possess, succeeded to an almost incredible extent in imposing upon the ready belief of the readers of that period. We cannot have a stronger illustration of this circumstance than the testimony which was given by such distinguished men as Clemens Alexandrinus and Origen to the authenticity of that singularly wild composition, the apocryphal epistle of Barnabas; a work which, from the strange interpolations and misrepresentations of the Levitical law, and the many gross blunders* which it contains, would

* Such, for instance, as the supposition, evidently implied, that the patriarch Abraham must have spoken Greek.

appear at once to carry with it its own refutation. But for these the reader is referred to the elaborate dissertation upon this and the other spurious works of antiquity, by the Rev. Jeremiah Jones. It may, however, be here worth observing, that amongst other mistakes into which the unknown author of this work has fallen, he has committed one which by a singular coincidence a century later was repeated by the celebrated Lactantius; a blunder so gross, that the mere fact of its transmission to our times seems to mark the age which did not at once reject it, as strangely deficient even in the most commonly required knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. I allude to the celebrated prophecy respecting Cyrus, which occurs in Isaiah xlv. 1. It seems scarcely credible that both the writers above mentioned, quoting the Old Testament from the Greek of the Septuagint instead of the original Hebrew, should have been so ignorant of that most remarkable Scripture fact, as to have read the word *κύριος* instead of *κῦρος*; and thus, mistaking the real meaning of the passage, have applied the passage in question solely to the person of Christ. *Τῷ Χριστῷ μου Κυρίῳ*, are the words of the former: "Sic dicit Dominus Deus Christo Domino meo,"* are the words of the latter. What would be thought of the biblical knowledge of any writer of the present day who could commit such a mistake as the above? and what then must we think of the weight of authority attached to the oral traditions of an age which could transmit such an one unnoticed and uncensured?† I am aware, indeed,

* Lactantii de Vera Sapientia, lib. iv. cap. 12.

† Another and a singular instance of the implicit credulity with which some of the early Christian writers adopted the statements of their predecessors, often in defiance of the most accessible historical evidence to the contrary, and with a total absence of critical discrimination, occurs in the reference made by Eusebius, in the 13th chapter of the 2d book of his Ecclesiastical History to the narrative of Justin

with respect to Lactantius, that he has generally been considered much more of a rhetorician than a divine, and that as a reasoner he has justly been held cheap: still, as a popular writer may always be presumed in some degree to represent the tone of feeling and acquirements of the period in which he lives, we may surely, without any breach of charity, attribute some portion of the ignorance here displayed to the contemporaries for whom he writes. Let me now add another specimen of this same author's mode of discussing points of Christian doctrine, and then leave the reader to judge of the state of the science of theology at that time, and how far the revelations of Scripture are likely to be rendered clearer by illustrations of the following description. "Our Saviour," says he, "is clearly of a different nature from the angels, inasmuch as he is the *Word*, whereas they are merely the *Spirit* (i. e. breath) of God. Now a *word* is not merely breath, but breath accompanied by speech; and as breath and speech proceed from different parts of the body, breath issuing from the *nostrils*, and speech from the *mouth*, there must of necessity be a vast difference between the Son of God and the angels."*

Martyr, respecting the asserted deification of Simon Magus by the Roman people. The strange blunder committed by Justin in mistaking a pillar erected on the island of the Tiber to Semo Sancus, an old Sabine deity, to whom allusion is made in the 20th chapter of the 8th book of Livy, for a monument in honour of the impostor Simon Magus, is a matter of notoriety. Now surely it is no exaggeration to assert, that had any writer of modern times committed a mistake of this gross character in relating an historical fact, the exposure would have been immediate, and his name would have ceased, as a matter of course, to be quoted as an authority. And yet on this occasion we find Eusebius, after an interval of no less than 150 years, from the time of Justin, repeating his statement without the slightest apparent misgiving as to its accuracy; although the inscription in question recorded upon a public monument, and the passage in Livy above referred to, might have put any common inquirer during the whole of that long period in possession of the real fact."

* "Cautum est (in Scripturis) illum Dei Filium Dei esse sermonem: itemque ceteros angelos Dei Spiritus esse. Nam sermo est spiritus cum voce aliquid signi-

From this period the progress of innovation advanced with a rapidly accelerated pace, so that before the close of the fourth century, a vast portion of the abuses of the simple spirit of Christianity, which human invention, in the vain attempt to improve the best gift of Providence, has superadded to primitive revelation, and which have subsequently been matured into Popery in its worst form, had become almost completely established. Monkeny, accompanied by a spirit of asceticism more worthy of the fakirs of Hindostan than of the followers of Christ; the adoration of relics; exorcisms; prayers for the dead; the *sacrifice*, as it now began generally to be called, of the Eucharist; with an unsuspecting readiness of belief in the most monstrous legends,* form henceforward the leading characteristics of the period. The spiritual worship of God, as taught in Scripture, and approximation to Him through faith in the one great Sacrifice, once offered, had now given place to unmeaning external ceremonies and rites, which, whilst professing to be part of the forms of Christian worship, had notwithstanding, much nearer resemblance to the superstitious usages of heathenism than to the pure soul-stirring devotion of the Gospel. The spirit of Christianity, indeed, still existed, but it existed under the superincumbent weight of a portentous mass of superstition. It is surely impossible not to perceive under how entire a misapprehension of the genius of our religion the world at that time lay, when we find even Augustine himself speaking with approbation of the performance of the Eucharistic sacrifice for the pur-

ficante prolatus. Sed tamen, quoniam spiritus et sermo diversis partibus proferuntur; siquidem spiritus naribus, ore sermo procedit, magna in hunc Dei Filium et ceteros angelos differentia est." De Vera Sapientia, lib. iv. cap. 8.

* See for instance the strange narrative of miracles attributed to Gregory Thaumaturgus in the life of that Saint.

pose of removing a murrain among cattle, supposed to have been produced by the operation of evil demons;* or again gravely recounting a miraculous vision sent by the Almighty for no better purpose than that of discovering the interred bones of Gervasius and Protasius, after their concealment during the space of two centuries, and affording a divine sanction to a superstitious, not to say an idolatrous, species of worship.† Let the reader only cast his eye over the eighth chapter of the 22d book of the “*De Civitate Dei*,” just now referred to, or to the still more strange legends gravely related by Sulpicius Severus, at about the same period, and he cannot but admit that, however abundant in other respects the age of which we are now speaking may have been in works of true piety and in fervour of religious feeling, still that at all events strong judgment and calm good sense were not to be numbered among its excellences. And yet let it be remembered, that through this very period, and through periods even still darker than this, must the oral traditions of the Church have descended, and have descended unimpaired, if they are to be accepted by us at the present day as sound portions of the primitive teaching of the Apostles. Surely we might as reasonably expect that the Jordan, could it recover its original and obliterated channel, would reappear from the saltiness of the Dead Sea as fresh and pure as when it first entered it, as that mere verbal communications on some of the most mysterious problems that can possibly occupy the thoughts of man, should have passed on from individual to individual for the space of eighteen centuries, unadulterated by the false theories with which they would necessarily come

* *De Civitate Dei*, lib. xxii. cap. 8.

† *Confessionum*, lib. ix. cap. 8.

into collision, the exaggerations of mistaken piety, the dreams of superstition, or the mistakes of ignorance.

And yet such is the rival which we are earnestly called upon at this moment, and by influential members of our own church, to set up as of equal and concurrent authority with holy writ! A rival, asserted by Mr. Keble to be “parallel to Scripture, not derived from it; and consequently fixing the interpretation of disputed texts, not simply by the judgment of the Church, but by the authority of that Holy Spirit which inspired the oral teaching itself, of which such tradition is the record.” And for the recovery of this “good deposit” we are told by the same author that “*present opportunities of doing good; external quietness, peace, and order; a good understanding with the temporal and civil power; the love and co-operation of those committed to our charge;—these, and all other pastoral consolations must be given up*, though it be with a heavy heart, rather than we should yield one jot or tittle of the faith once delivered by the Saints.” A high and portentous price this, surely, for the forlorn hope of obtaining so very equivocal a possession! Most of my readers are probably well acquainted with the efforts which have been made for some time past in this University, by means of periodical publications, and on more than one marked occasion, by exhortations from the pulpit, to establish the opinions which I am now deprecating. With regard to the authors of these publications and discourses, I wish to speak of them, so far as I am acquainted with them personally or by common report, with all the respect that they justly deserve, for their admitted learning, their talents, and the purity and holiness of their lives. But I cannot, nor do I wish to conceal my opinion, that the doctrines which they advocate, should they become popular, would in other hands

be essentially injurious to the cause of pure Protestantism, and with it to sound Christianity, in this country. In this case, the respectability of the advocates must not make us blind to the danger likely to ensue from the principles which they adopt.* The integrity and sufficiency of the written revelation of God's will has been openly and systematically impugned by them. We have been told distinctly, that as the New Testament was written for the use of men previously converted to the Christian faith, it contains the scheme of the Christian doctrines only in such measure as might be expected from words intended rather to remind men of what they already know, than to instruct

* The following extracts from the writings of a late contributor to the "Tracts for the Times," published by his friends, will show that the feelings of at least some members of the body superintending those publications can scarcely be said to be friendly to Protestantism.

"I should like to know why you flinch from saying that the power of making the body and blood of Christ is vested in the successors of the Apostles." Froude's Remains, vol. i. p. 326.

"I verily believe that he (P.) would now gladly consent to see our Communion Service replaced by a good translation of the Liturgy of St. Peter; a name which I advise you to substitute in your notes to — for the obnoxious phrase 'Mass Book.'" Ib. p. 387.

"I am led to question whether justification by faith is an integral part of this doctrine (i.e. the doctrine necessary to salvation.)" Ib. p. 332.

"Why do you praise Ridley? Do you know any sufficient good about him to counterbalance the fact that he was the associate of Cranmer, Peter Martyr, and Bucer?" Ib. pp. 293, 294.

"Really I hate the Reformation and the Reformers more and more." Ib. 389.

"The Reformation was a limb badly set. It must be broken again in order to be righted." Ib. p. 433.

"I must say a word or two on your casual remark about the unpopularity of our notions among 'Bible Christians.' Don't you think Newton's system would be unpopular among 'sky astronomers,' just in the same way? The phenomena of the heavens are repugnant to Newton, just in the same way as the letter of Scripture to the Church, i. e. on the assumption that they contradict every notion which they do not make self-evident, which is the basis of 'Bible Christianity' and also of Protestantism; and of which your trumpety principles about 'Scripture being the sole rule in *fundamentals*' (I nauseate the word), is but a mutilated edition." Ib. pp. 412, 413.

them in first principles. That accordingly it rather alludes to doctrines, than states what those doctrines really are. That a person, previously prepared by catechetical instruction in the orthodox teaching transmitted by tradition, may indeed find all the necessary truths of Christianity virtually announced in Holy Writ, but that without such previous discipline of the understanding he would probably search there for these in vain. It is assumed (and, as it appears to me, most gratuitously assumed), that, because the time once existed in the Church's infancy, when the first Apostles preached only by word of mouth, therefore that mode of arriving at truth is at this moment necessary for attaining to certainty in matters of faith, and that there must still be certain outlying doctrines, forming an integral portion of revelation, which have never yet been embodied in inspired Scripture, but are to be picked up only by an humble and laborious search into the opinions and teaching of primitive antiquity. It has been asserted, that even the fundamental doctrine of the blessed Trinity, though undoubtedly so far contained in Scripture, that every one prepared by previous oral instruction may clearly recognise it there, is still so indistinctly stated, that the mere Bible student would almost necessarily overlook it, and proceed onwards to Socinianism; and that even where the purport of any passage of Scripture appears entirely clear and satisfactory to our own minds, still we are bound to surrender our own judgment, should our construction of the meaning of the sentence appear to be contrary to what we have reason to believe to have been the view taken of it by the primitive church.* Now if these opinions

* All the above opinions will be familiar with the present residents of this University, as having been advocated from the pulpit.

are really such as I now describe them (and it is far from my wish to overrate or misrepresent them), then I own I see not how it is possible to adopt them without suffering a diminished respect for the sacred writings, and, instead of looking to an infallible and tangible revelation of God's will, finding ourselves left to hunt after truth among all the shifting caprices and inventions of human speculation. And surely we may well ask, Can this really be so? Is it, can it be, essential to a sound faith, that we should surrender the verdict of our own deliberate judgment in the attempt to understand the plain text of Scripture, merely because a certain number of uninspired human beings, like ourselves, may have thought otherwise?—men not removed indeed so far as ourselves from the apostolic age in point of time, but perhaps more separated from it than even we ourselves are at the present day, by the interrupted intercourse of man with man which prevailed at that period, by the scanty circulation of their literature, and their ignorance of the necessary canons of sound criticism. If we begin to adopt merely human dogmas, solely because they are ancient, where, it will naturally be asked, are we to stop? What is to limit us to the first seemingly unimportant deviation from or superaddition to the strict letter of Scripture, and to check us from proceeding through all the gradations of a slowly but uniformly deepening superstition? Let us imagine the case of a human being who had derived his whole knowledge of the Christian religion from the perusal of the New Testament, and who had never heard of the distinction of sects into which the Church is now unfortunately divided, and let us suppose that person to be led into a Romish place of worship, and to be told that he should see the rite of our Lord's last supper performed according to his parting injunction. Well then.

The priest appears singly at an altar in his splendid attire. He performs sundry mysterious gesticulations in silence. He turns his back to the congregation; he holds up a wafer; a bell rings, and the whole assemblage drop upon their knees. We can well imagine the unconcern with which the person here supposed would look on at this strange isolated ceremony, the natural curiosity with which he would ask when the celebration which he came to witness would commence, and his utter astonishment and incredulity when he should be told that what he had already seen was that very celebration. And yet, remote as in every circumstance is the ceremony of the mass from the Eucharistic rite as instituted by our Saviour, the transition has been one of minute and almost imperceptible gradations. Men, in their attempts to improve or to add solemnity to the original institution, suggested day after day their respective seemingly innocent conceits, until in the course of time the most holy, affecting, and soul-stirring ordinance of our religion thus changed its whole form and character. And so will it be with the other integral portions of the Christian doctrine, unless we take our stand firmly, inexorably, and obstinately, at the commencement of the very first deviation from what we find written, and point to the record of God's word as the only acknowledged foundation of our faith. It seems at first sight a harsh and cold-minded scrupulousness to check the workings of a devout and enthusiastic imagination, anxious only to do justice to, and to develop all the recondite mysteries which it supposes to be wrapt up in some point of revealed doctrine: but fatal experience has shown how dangerous it is to indulge this disposition to advance beyond what God has expressly revealed. Once give the reins to an unchecked fancy, excite the religious mind by allowing it to plunge into

the depths of mysticism, or please the eye by the glitter of an ostentatious ceremonial, and it becomes difficult to set any bounds to the deviousness of our course. As age succeeds to age, theories and ceremonies accumulate in rapid succession, until the form and substance of religion has undergone an almost entire change. Then at length arrives the time in which it is necessary either to acknowledge ourselves in error, discarding our long-cherished delusion, and manfully returning to the point from which we set out; or, what is much more gratifying to human pride, boldly to vindicate the line we have taken, either by wresting the words of revelation from their original purport until they answer our purpose, or setting up the sanction of an assumed tradition in direct opposition to it. Such is the course openly avowed by the Church of Rome; and such must in some degree be the course of every denomination of Christians who look for the groundwork of their faith beyond the boundary of what they find written.

I am well aware how indignantly, and beyond all doubt, sincerely and conscientiously, the champions of the party already adverted to repel from themselves the imputation of Popery. That they do not indeed adopt the gross and extreme errors of the Church of Rome must be obvious to all acquainted with their writings. But I cannot therefore, I own, as an individual, shut my eyes to the dangerous tendency of their opinions. They may themselves indeed stop short, before they seriously transgress the boundary of scriptural and evangelical truth. But will their humble imitators, will men who, without their talents, their learning, and their fervent piety, look up to them as patterns—will they be content to confine themselves within the same limits? We hear much now-a-days of the golden age of English theology, the divines of the reigns of Charles

I. and II. It ought at once to instil a caution into us against the implicit adoption of all the principles of even the very best men of that period, that the progress of political events had in those days generated a bitterness and exasperation of feeling, with a tendency to extreme and uncompromising distinctions in matters of religion, highly unfavourable to the due discussion of truth. No candid person can at this moment believe that Laud was insincere in his solemn disavowals of the extreme doctrines of the Church of Rome. Yet who can read the history of the ecclesiastical events in which he was engaged, and not feel that the bias of his mind lay in a very different direction from that of the great and powerful minds who brought about the Reformation, and established our Church upon a purely scriptural basis? We all remember the remarkable entry in his journal, bearing date, August 17, 1633.

“Saturday. I had a serious offer made me again to be a Cardinal. I was then from court: but so soon as I came thither, (which was Wednesday, August 21,) I acquainted his majesty with it. But my answer again was, that somewhat dwelt within me, which would not suffer that, till Rome were other than it is.”

Here, no doubt, is an express disavowal of uniformity of opinion with the Romish Church; and yet we cannot but remark with how little surprise a Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury appears to have received this strange communication.

But we have also another instance on record of the dangers resulting to Protestantism from the adoption of that “*Via media*” which characterized the theology of the age of the Stuarts. Anne Hyde, the Duchess of York, died, it will be remembered, a convert to her husband’s religion. In a paper published after her death, from her own autograph, the following reasons

are assigned for her apostacy from the creed of her childhood. "I made it," are her words, "my continual request to Almighty God that, if I were not, I might before I died, be in the true religion. I did not in the least doubt but that I was so, and never had any manner of scruple till November last; when reading a book called 'the history of the Reformation' by Dr. Heylin, which I had heard very much commended, and had been told, if ever I had any doubt in my religion, that would settle me; instead of which, I found it the description of the horridest sacrileges in the world; &c. * * * These scruples being raised, I began to consider of the difference between the Catholics and us; and examined them as well as I could, by the holy Scripture; which, though I do not pretend to be able to understand, yet there are some things I found so easy, that I cannot but wonder I had been so long without finding them out; as, the real presence in the blessed Sacrament, the infallibility of the Church, confession, and praying for the dead. After this I spoke severally to two of the best Bishops we have in England, (Dr. Sheldon, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Dr. Blanford, Bishop of Worcester,) who *both* told me there were many things in the Roman Church which it were very much to be wished we had kept; as confession, which was, no doubt, commanded by God: that praying for the dead was one of the most antient things in Christianity; that for their parts they did it daily, though they would not own it. And afterwards pressing one of them (Dr. Blanford) very much upon the other points, he told me, that if he had been bred a Catholic he would not change his religion; but that being of another church, wherein he was sure, were all things necessary to salvation, he thought it very ill to give that scandal as to leave that church wherein he had received his baptism." It is, I repeat this leaning,

not actually to popery itself, but assuredly in the direction of popery, which constitutes, in my mind, the danger to be apprehended from the school of theology, attempted within the last few years to be set up in this University. That the leading writers of that party, sincerely as no doubt they believe themselves to be doing good service to the established Church of England, are in some degree swayed by such a bias, I cannot, I own, from the general tenor of their publications,* for a moment doubt. It is true that many of them are very far from agreeing in the abstract principle of placing

* A symptom of the bias above alluded to, may be observed in the Church Calendar for the present year, emanating from this party. Amongst other things connected with Church matters, it contains four short pieces of poetry selected from the works of George Herbert: from the last of which the following lines are an extract. The title is, "To all angels and Saints." One surely cannot doubt the state of feeling which led to their insertion.

"Not out of envy or maliciousness

Do I forbear to crave your special aid.

I would address

My vows to Thee most gladly, blessed maid,

And mother of my God, in my distress:

Thou art the holy mine, whence came the gold,

The great restorative for all decay

In young and old:

Thou art the cabinet, where the jewel lay:

Chiefly to Thee would I my soul unfold.

But now, alas! I dare not: for our King,

Whom we do all jointly adore and praise,

Bids no such thing:

And where his pleasure no injunction lays

('Tis your own case) ye never move a wing.

All worship is prerogative, and a flower

Of his rich crown, from whom lies no appeal

At the last hour:

Therefore we dare not from his garland steal,

To make a posy for inferior power.

Although then others court you, if ye know

What's done on earth, we shall not fare the worse

Who do not so:

Since we are ever ready to disburse,

If any one our Maker's hand can show."

tradition on an entire level with Scripture; but assuredly by introducing the rule of making it a test and criterion for the *interpretation* of Scripture, they are practically assigning to it an equality, if not a supremacy, real in substance, however it may be denied in words.

Let me not, however, be understood as wishing to depreciate the value of tradition when legitimately employed. It must necessarily be gratifying and encouraging to every sincere Christian student to find, as he generally will find, the obvious purport of the revealed Scriptures, illustrated by the professed belief and practice of the orthodox primitive Church. It removes every lingering doubt and misgiving on our part, to find that the immediate followers of the Apostles thought and read precisely as we think and read: and it is certainly an argument the more in favour of that form of Church government which the Apostles adopted, and which our own country still receives, that we find that for the first fifteen centuries of the Christian æra, it was never departed from by any large denomination of believers. There is again something singularly pleasing to the imagination, and profitable to our better feelings, in the idea that in our forms of worship, in the expression of our prayers and praises, we are not only uttering the same sentiments, but almost the self-same form of words with which the primitive saints and martyrs approached their Maker and their Redeemer. Still, however, we are not to confound what is merely useful and praiseworthy, with what, as articles of belief, are necessary for salvation. Tradition may supply the former, but it can do nothing whatever towards furnishing us with the latter. It is on the rigorous observance of this distinction, I repeat, that the soundness and purity of our faith as Christians must finally depend. The moment that we find tradition set up as an integral

portion of revelation, (and such we are now, even by members of our own Church, occasionally told that it is,*) from that moment it becomes our duty to point out the weakness of its claims to so high a distinction.

But say the advocates of tradition, it is far from our wish to attach an infallible authority to all those oral transmissions of doctrine or of usage indiscriminately, which have descended to us from the primitive times. Our theory is far more cautious and discriminating than the one above supposed. The canon of Vincentius of Lerins, "*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus,*" constitutes our rule. Those traditions only which have been received in all ages of the Church, in all parts of Christendom, and by the great mass of Christians, we acknowledge as binding upon the conscience, and as really constituting a standard of faith. Be it so. Undoubtedly this is an important limitation. But then, unfortunately, this is a limitation so extensive, that, if acted upon, it would make the exception entirely exclude the rule. For, after all, what are the doctrines connected in any way with tradition which can in strictness be said to have been thus adopted, "*semper, ubique, et ab omnibus?*" Can any one article of a Christian man's belief, not expressly enunciated in Scripture, be said to come under this category? We hear the institution of the celebration of our Lord's day, and the non-observance of the Jewish sabbath quoted as a case in point. I deny that it is so. We have authority in Scripture for the celebration of the Lord's day, and we read enough in Scripture to justify our non-observance of the Jewish sabbath. But so far is tradition from being

* "He was one of those who, feeling strongly the inadequacy of their own intellects to guide them to religious truth, are prepared to throw themselves unreservedly on *revelation*, whether found in *Scripture* or *Antiquity*."—British Critic for January, 1838.

uniform on this question, that we know that for a considerable period after our Lord's ascension a large body of Christians continued to celebrate both days; and that it was only by slow degrees that the former entirely superseded the latter. Again, we are told that it is to tradition that we must look for our warrant for the adoption of the rite of infant baptism. This instance is, however, as defective as the former. Here, as Bishop Taylor observes, we have again the sanction of Scripture in the analogous case of infant circumcision, whilst that of tradition fails us,—the practice of infant baptism having been, as is well known, by no means universal in the early Church. Even the great fundamental doctrine of the blessed Trinity, in its orthodox acceptance, clearly as it is conveyed by Scripture to those who will submit to accept it according to the obvious meaning of the language, can scarcely be asserted to have the sanction of tradition limited by the rule just now quoted, when we recollect how very large a portion of mankind at one time adhered to the Arian heresy. But the fact is, that plausible as the canon of Vincentius may appear, it is one which practically is never very rigorously enforced by the champions of tradition. It will generally be found to relax itself when required, so as to include almost every favourite speculation of the parties quoting it. Who, for instance, would ever have supposed that the Church of Rome, with its masses—its image worship—its purgatory and its indulgences—would gravely appeal to this very test by which to try the validity of its own traditions? And yet, so it is. Nothing can be more modest or cautious than the rule which it prescribes to itself. Take, for example, the words of the Romanist Moreri, as given in his General Dictionary, under the head "Tradition." They are as follows:—"Parmi les Chrétiens on distingue deux

moïens de connoître la parole de Dieu, et la doctrine de Jésus Christ; qui sont l'Ecriture Sainte, et la tradition. Les Catholiques les croient tous deux de même autorité, et les hérétiques n'oseroient pas nier que la tradition ne soit d'une grande autorité; mais il faut comprendre sous le nom de tradition les écrits des pères, qui rendent témoignage de la doctrine, qu'ils ont reçue de leurs ancêtres, et enseignée à ceux qui leur ont succédé, comme la doctrine de l'Eglise Catholique. *Et afin que les traditions soient la règle de la Foi, il faut qu'elles aient les conditions marquées par Vincent de Lerins dans son mémoire, qui sont 'l'antiquité, l'universalité, et l'uniformité,' qu'il paroisse que c'est une doctrine enseignée dans toute l'Eglise, en tout tems, et par tous les docteurs Catholiques. Les traditions qui n'ont pas ces caractères sont sujettes à l'erreur et il ne faut pas se fier à des traditions populaires, dénuées de preuves et de témoins."* Such is the security afforded against the possible adulteration of the Christian doctrine by the adoption of this celebrated canon! Can we for a moment question the authenticity and soundness of the Romish traditions, after their having been tested by so safe a criterion?

But the final, and, as it is imagined, the most cogent argument is yet to come. It is, we are told, to nothing more or less than the tradition of the early Church, that we owe our belief in the authenticity of the canonical Scriptures themselves. In other words, that the New Testament itself is but primitive tradition in another form. Now this often quoted argument, I own, appears to me nothing more than a piece of captious sophistry. True it is, that the New Testament, like every other permanent gift of Providence, has descended through successive generations to our time; but then, it has descended as an acknowledged historical fact, believed in by the early Fathers of the Church, but not,

therefore, deriving its authority from them. In fact, it would be almost as accurate an expression to call the pyramids of Egypt a tradition, as to designate the apostolical writings as such. The primitive Christians transmitted them to us because they believed them to be the infallible word of God; but the belief of that early age is not the only proof, much less is it the cause of their infallibility. If it were, then any written composition, which the collective opinions of the primitive Church might have chosen to sanction, would be a part of divine revelation. But this conclusion is evidently unsound. Not all the united voices of antiquity, for instance, could have proved the epistle of Clemens to be the word of God, for it contains the assertion of a physical fact which is obviously false. The same may be said of all the uninspired writings of the primitive Fathers. They are, no doubt, the works of good and pious men; but not all the testimony of all ages combining could show them to be free from error, and therefore worthy of being received as canonical and inspired writings. “*Invaluit apud plerosque perniciosissimus error, Scripturæ tantum inesse momenti quantum illi Ecclesiæ suffragiis conceditur; ac si vero æterna inviolabilisque Dei veritas hominum arbitrio niteretur: sic enim, magno cum ludibrio Spiritus Sancti, quærunt. Ecquis nobis fidem faciat, hæc a Deo prodiisse? Ecquis salva et intacta ad nostram usque ætatem pervenisse, certiores reddat? Ecquis persuadeat librum hunc reverenter accipiendum, alterum numero expungendum, nisi certam istorum omnium regulam Ecclesia præscriberet? Pendet igitur, inquiunt, ab Ecclesiæ determinatione et quæ Scripturæ reverentia debeatur, et qui libri in ejus catalogo censendi sint. Ita sacrilegi homines, dum sub Ecclesiæ prætextu volunt effrænatam tyrannidem invehere, nihili curant quibus se et alios absurditatibus illaqueent, modo*

hoc unum extorqueant apud simplices, *Ecclesiam nihil non posse.*"*—Calvini Institut. lib. i. cap. 7.

* Let me here be permitted to extract from a recent number of the British Critic, (that for October, 1838,) the words of a writer evidently adopting the views of that party in our Church, whose peculiar sentiments have given occasion to the remarks contained in these pages. I quote them, as affording a fair specimen of the plausible, but, as it appears to me, unsatisfactory and superficial arguments by which the doctrines in question have been recommended to young minds." "It is very true," says the reviewer, "that we are to be able to give a reason for the faith that is in us; but this is no command to give a wrong reason; and it is a wrong reason, that is, an injudicious, an unscriptural, a faithless and wilful reason, however true and logically conclusive in itself, when we believe Christianity, *not because the Church has told us, in recognition of her authority, and in obedience to her commands, as our lawful and natural superior*, but because its doctrines are conformable to our individual reason, its laws agreeable to our own personal moral feeling—the history of the Bible reconcilable with the history of Herodotus or Livy—its mysteries, improved repetitions of the theories of Plato and Aristotle—its physical narrations borne out by appearances in stones and planets—its whole scheme precisely what we should expect from our knowledge and notions of the Deity. . . . A man cannot rest without a resting place distinct from himself, nor feel confidence except in a power other and higher than his own. But when he appeals to the *truth*, and *reasonableness*, and *morality*, and *consistency* of Christianity, to any thing but *testimony*, over which he exercises no control whatever, he is after all only appealing to himself; to what seems true, and reasonable, and consistent to himself. . . . Against this there is but one security—*testimony*, and *authority*: and if the Church will consent once more to take its stand here, nothing can shake it." Now, whilst I conceive that every well-disposed Bible student will readily make common cause with the anonymous writer whose words are here quoted, against every attempt to reduce the sublime doctrines of revelation to the inadequate standard of mere human reason, still I can by no means think that he ought therefore so far to reject all the testimony of that intellect, and of those moral feelings, which the Almighty has decreed to be integral portions of his nature, as to throw himself implicitly into the opposite, and, as it seems to me, the not less unscriptural extreme. Why, one is naturally induced to inquire, are we to cast away as unsound or dangerous, that satisfied conviction of our moral and rational faculties, resulting from an impartial examination of the internal and external evidence of revelation, when through its means we have arrived at the conclusion, that the Bible really and indeed speaks as never mortal man spake, and is beyond a doubt the inspired word of God? What is the gain, I cannot but ask, in a spiritual and religious point of view, in thus closing our intellectual eyesight, and throwing ourselves blindly upon mere authority? What is the *authority*, one naturally feels disposed to inquire, to which the Reviewer would direct us? Is it that of the Christians of the primitive ages? These, however, were mere human beings like ourselves; and whence, then, we again ask, did those very persons derive *their* conviction? Was it from argument which was found satisfactory to their own understanding? If so, why then should we be refused the privilege of employing the same instrument? Was it from arbi-

But it is necessary to bring these remarks to a conclusion. Let me then by way of protest against a set of opinions zealously propagated at the present moment, but most dangerous, as I conceive, to the cause of Protestantism, recapitulate in a few words what are at least my own views upon this important and much agitated question. I am of opinion then, that in mercy and condescension to mankind, God has been pleased to confer upon us a full and perfect written revelation of his will, as an infallible guide to salvation. I conceive that that revelation, as finally consummated in the Christian scheme, is the development of a system of spiritual holiness which, if accepted with an humble and submissive mind, will lead us to the most exalted notions of the Divine Being, and to practical habits of the most consummate purity. I believe that the presumed difficulties in the interpretation of Scripture, so much dwelt upon by the advocates of tradition, are occasioned much more by the vain curiosity, the besetting prejudices, and the unsubdued passions of mankind, than by any real want of clearness in the written record. Taken, according to the plain and obvious interpretation of its language, and commented upon solely by the analogy of Scripture with Scripture, the prophecies of the Old Testament being carefully compared with their fulfilment in the New, I conceive that the Bible must neces-

trary external dictation? Yet even the satisfied assent to dictation presupposes the exercise of the reasoning powers. If we are told that they believed the Scripture, because testimony was borne to it by inspired men, then we necessarily ask, "where is the proof of their inspiration?" We cannot, consistently with this course of argument, reply, that such proof is to be found in the Scripture itself, for that would be mere reasoning in a circle, proving Scripture by the inspiration of its first teachers, and the inspiration of the first teachers of Christianity by Scripture. And yet such are the difficulties which beset us, when, following the recommendation of the Reviewer, we would discard as irrelevant the *evidences* of our faith, and cast ourselves exclusively upon *authority*.

sarily give out to every earnest inquirer after truth, the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity in unity,* of justification and redemption through humble faith in the expiatory merits of Christ, and of sanctification, branching out into all the several duties towards God and man, through the aid of the Holy Spirit. If scriptural students fail of arriving at these sublime truths, it is, I believe, because they will not condescend to take Scripture as they find it; but having previously made up their minds that certain principles must be true, that others, however strongly attested, must be false, they reject large portions of the sacred writings as spurious, and put the most forced and improbable construction upon others, rather than admit that God's ways are not as their ways, nor His thoughts as their thoughts. For the correction of errors of this description, the proper remedy will, I imagine, be found, not in calling in the equivocal and uncertain aid of tradition, and in substituting a bending for an unbending standard. If they

* There can scarcely be a stronger admission on the part of the Unitarians, that the New Testament, if taken in its natural context, and according to the received canon, does convey the Trinitarian doctrine, than the shifts which, contrary to all the rules of sound criticism, they are obliged to have recourse to, in order to avoid coming to that conclusion. Thus, in what they have termed their "*Improved version of the New Testament*," they are reduced to the denial of the authenticity of the first two chapters of Matthew's, and of the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel, whilst of the accuracy of their translation from the original Greek, the following extracts may serve as specimens:—"The word was in the beginning, and the word was with God, and the word was *a* God (thus they add in a note, Moses is declared to be *a* God to Pharaoh). All things were done by him, and without him was not any thing done that hath been done."—St. John i. 1-3. "He was in the world, and the world was *enlightened* by him."—Ib. v. 10. "And the word *was* flesh, and full of kindness and truth; he dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only Son, *who came from the Father*."—Ib. v. 16. "*God is thy throne* for ever and ever."—Hebrews i. 8. In these passages we find the direct construction of the original language violated, because, if literally rendered, they would at once assert our Saviour's divinity. Would any thing be gained, in dealing with men who thus shut their eyes against the written word, by pressing them with arguments derived from mere tradition?

deny the authority, or tamper with the letter of the written word, they will not readily submit to the unwritten, however dogmatically vouched as genuine. The real remedy for this proud spirit of unbelief will be best found in inculcating that artless innocence of the moral sense which our Redeemer enjoins; in subduing the arrogance of a captious understanding, and, in making, if possible, the hunger and thirst of the soul after righteousness predominate over the wanton curiosity of the intellect. Professing these sentiments, it is scarcely necessary for me to repeat, that I do not conceive that one single particle of revelation, in the strict meaning of the term, is conveyed to us by tradition only. It appears to me highly improbable, that any portion of the necessary articles of belief should have been originally allowed to remain extraneous to the written word; and it appears to me certain, that, if ever such portions were left floating in oral tradition only, at all events the record of them is now irredeemably lost.

On the other hand I repeat I am far from wishing to undervalue legitimate tradition. It is at all events a natural and an amiable feeling in those who believe the Holy Scriptures to have been the work of inspired men, to wish to approximate as nearly as possible to the times in which those men lived; to imbibe their feelings in all their freshness, and to worship God after the self-same forms in which they worshipped. Much respect, moreover, is due to long-established authority, and more still to those sober ordinances, and that decent discipline, which have been established by the general agreement of Christians, under spiritual pastors and rulers, holding their appointments according to a rule sanctioned by Scripture itself. A mind duly trained to look to the written word for the sole rule of its faith,

will ever be ready to conform its practice to institutions which it feels to be in full accordance with what is there enjoined. "Where two or three are met together in my name, there I am in the midst of you," will be a text which will often recur to a person thus disciplined, and he will feel that in resisting the authorities, whom God has set over him, he is rebelling against God, and, much as in him lies, quenching his Holy Spirit.

If, then, in the course of the preceding remarks, I have appeared to speak depreciatingly of human tradition, let it be remembered that I have done so from a deep conviction of the weakness and darkness of the human understanding, the moment that the light of revelation is withdrawn from it. Admitting that revelation ceased with the apostolic age, it appears to me that it were an inconsistency to attach more respect to the opinions and surmises of the earlier Christians, than would naturally be due to any set of good and religious men, possessing, indeed, some advantages over ourselves for the acquisition of knowledge, but labouring under many most serious disadvantages, and liable to be led into error, no less by the suggestions of their own, not always well-judging, piety, than by other causes. The one great failing so natural to us all, which it has been my object to deprecate, is that officious and misplaced ingenuity, which is ever seeking to find out modes and forms of worship which God never sanctioned, attaching to them unnecessary importance, and erecting into articles of faith usages, which at the best are harmless, and not unfrequently are serious deviations from some primitive commandment. Where, indeed, this frame of mind exists, it is not merely against tradition that a caution is necessary. The very fountains of living waters themselves become corrupted and tainted by it. Scripture, by dint of distorted texts and forced inter-

pretations, will lend its aid, no less than the presumed oral sanction of antiquity, to the most unscriptural doctrines, where the mind, attached to its early habits, is determined at all events to defend and maintain them. It matters not to persons thus disposed, by how tortuous a construction the end is arrived at. A few detached words of holy writ are wrested from the main context. The Church, as it is called, affixes to them its own interpretation. The impugner is at once silenced, and the commandments of men are henceforward taught as truths from heaven. Thus, from the expression of the Psalmist, "Like as we have heard, so have we *seen*," the Church of Rome has been known to defend no less a monstrous doctrine than that of image worship. "Lord, here are two swords," according to the same authority is a text at once confirmatory of the pope's temporal and spiritual authority; and the "*agite pœnitentiam*," of the Vulgate, in spite of the assertion of Quintilian, who declares the expression in correct latinity, to mean nothing more or less than "*repent*,"* is carefully rendered "*do penance*." But, if Scripture may be thus forced to sanction human abuses, much more easily, of course, may so uncertain and unsteady a thing as oral tradition (coloured as it ever is by the respective passions of the relator and the receiver,) be enlisted into the same service. No members of our own Church may as yet indeed have ever gone the unwarrantable lengths here supposed. But still may we not ask, where after all are we to stop, if we once overlook the definite line which separates the written word of God from the oral teaching of men, and attempt to extend to the latter the reverence which attaches only to the former?

* Præter novitatem, brevis etiam peti solet. Unde eousque processum est ut non pœniturum pro non acturo pœnitentiam . . . idem auctor dixerit.—Instit. Orator. lib. 9. cap. 3.

I repeat, and would repeat it again and again, a deep impression of the immense value of that foremost gift of the divine mercy, the inspired Scriptures, with a conviction that He who imparted to us that knowledge has made it adequate to the purpose for which it was intended; and that He is the best and only Judge what degree of mental illumination is good for us,—these appear to me to be the principles from which our faith, as followers of Christ, can *alone* derive consistency and certainty. We may attempt to go further, and seek to improve upon the doctrines thus placed ready made in our hands. The wish is a natural one. The anxious and devout mind ever thinks that it cannot do too much in God's service, and soon begins to prescribe to itself tasks and privations which revelation never required. So acted the Pharisees with respect to the ritual law of Moses. So have acted the monks of the Thebaid and the ascetics of the middle ages; and so act thousands of humble and sincere Christians at the present day, who, ignorant of the nature and extent of that liberty with which Christ has made them free, would open to themselves new and more perfect ways of righteousness. The attempt no doubt may be, and is, well intentioned. But it is notwithstanding founded on a misconception of the inevitable tendencies of the human intellect. Scripture and tradition are not *concurrent* but *rival* principles, and as such cannot safely be associated the one with the other. That one which is most congenial with our natural prejudices and weaknesses, will always be found eventually to triumph, by the exclusion of its less carnal adversary. So it has already been in the Romanist Churches of the continent of Europe, where at this moment tradition flourishes, but Scripture is comparatively overlooked. And such will be the result also in this country, should the day ever arrive when

the modified respect due to antiquity shall be elevated into a feeling of conscientious reverence. Is it in fact going beyond the truth, if I observe that symptoms of the evil which I am now deprecating, have already begun to display themselves? Already we hear the Bible spoken of, not as the great vehicle of original teaching, but as a point of appeal only. The Church we are told, by its summaries, its extracts, its expositions, must instruct catechetically, and the Scriptures must be referred to from time to time, as a guarantee for the orthodoxy of the doctrines thus inculcated. Against such a mode of instruction indeed as this, there can lie no objection, provided the continual resort to the inspired volume is enforced as a *concurrent* object of study. But the probability is, that such will not be the practice. Revealed truths will be taught as culled *from* the Bible, and not as taught *in* the Bible. Separated from the original context, detached doctrines will be presented to the mind in a more harsh and isolated form, than that in which they are contained in the word of God, and thus, whilst the facts of revelation will be preserved, the harmony, the keeping, and the analogy of the several parts of revelation one with the other will eventually be lost sight of. Let me explain what I mean by a comparison. What judgment would a young student in painting be able to form of one of the Cartoons of Raphael, were the separate figures presented to him one by one, without any reference to their position and grouping as integral portions of a large composition? He would be able to judge indeed of the accuracy of the individual drawing, but he would form an extremely feeble conception of the main intention of the artist. In like manner, I conceive that in order really to understand the teaching of the Bible, *we must read it in the Bible*. We shall then, and then only, be able to per-

ceive the exact proportion which one part of revelation bears to another, and to judge of its relative importance: to know in short what are the great, prominent and palmary truths there revealed; what are those simply ancillary, and secondary, not indeed in authority, but solely in extent and degree. Human teaching, even when derived from Scripture itself, where it does not convey the *whole* truth, must ever be received with a certain degree of suspicion. Men much too conscientious to alter what they find written, will still be too often tempted to set off to advantage their favourite doctrines, by giving them in their oral teaching a prominence which they do not possess in the original record. And thus human ingenuity and learning step in to colour and distort, and perplex the best gift of God. The result accordingly is, that theology as a science becomes at length too ponderous for the average understanding of mankind, and the humble, the timid, and the simple-minded are left dependent upon the glosses and expositions of schoolmen, instead of deriving their knowledge of their God and their Redeemer from the original fountain head. Such is the process by which grows up, insensibly and by degrees, the fatal, the unscriptural doctrine of *reserve in spiritual teaching*. The simple mind is declared to be unequal to the apprehension of the plainest revealed truth, until that truth be tested and examined by the labours of the learned. And thus man steps in, not indeed with the intention of interrupting or cutting off the descending streams of divine knowledge, but still determined at all events that they shall pass through earthen conduits, of which he is to reserve to himself the right of regulating and adjusting the supply. Reserve in scriptural teaching! How strangely does this expression sound in Protestant ears! It was our blessed Redeemer's boast

respecting his doctrine, that "to the poor the gospel was preached;" it was that of his great Apostle Paul, that, rejecting all human philosophy and human wisdom, he taught one thing only, "Christ crucified." This momentous truth he himself urged, and exhorted his followers to urge, "in season and out of season;" and yet in our own day we hear of learned men and good men holding back, as an esoteric doctrine, this central and fundamental position, as a thing not to be lightly laid bare to the gaze of the multitude! Of such an attempt we may, I trust, pronounce with confidence, that it cannot eventually succeed. The auxiliaries of learning, and the force of personal respectability may give it a momentary popularity; and an increase in practical holiness, and a more complete development of the religious principle may, by oversanguine minds, be anticipated as its probable result. But it requires nothing more than the knowledge afforded by past experience, to pronounce with confidence that it will disappoint all such expectation. Not having its foundation in revelation, and not being suited to the circumstances of human nature, its effect, if carried into operation, will no doubt be, in another generation, the revival of the cold superstitions of former ages, and the substitution of the abject slavery of external ordinances for the heartfelt devotion of the spiritual servant of Christ.

By way of conclusion, let me now subjoin a few observations upon some of those leading points of Christian doctrine which have been most affected by being brought into contact with ecclesiastical traditions.

OF BAPTISM.

The rite of baptism bears every appearance of being exactly analogous with that of circumcision under the Jewish ritual, as constituting the initiative introduction

into the divine covenant to which it is annexed. That it is universally required of all persons admitted into the Christian church, precisely as circumcision was of all members of the Jewish nation claiming the Levitical privileges, is evident from the command of our Saviour to baptize *all* nations, and from the whole tenor of his conversation with Nicodemus on the subject. It is moreover self-evident that no command, thus universal in its application, would be lightly given by the great Founder of our faith. We are therefore bound to believe that obedience on our part, accompanied with a due submission of the will to so positive an injunction, must necessarily be accompanied with some appropriate divine blessing, which we could not receive on any other terms. Granting then, as we necessarily must, the universal obligation of submitting to this ordinance, and the reality of the spiritual benefit annexed to its due performance, it remains, in the first place, to be considered how far Christians are justified in deviating from what would seem to have been the primitive usage, by administering it, as is now almost universally practised, to new-born infants. It will not, I think, be difficult to show that in this practice we are borne out by the spirit, if not the letter, of holy Scripture.

Upon the first preaching of the Gospel, it was natural that the larger portion of the persons coming to partake of this rite should have been adults; and we are not therefore to be surprised that the New Testament alludes only to such cases, and of course considers that service of the heart which consists in repentance for past sins, and acceptance through faith of the terms proffered by the Gospel, as generally coincident with it in point of time. But it by no means follows, that what circumstances made necessary at that particular period, should constitute a rule strictly binding in all future

ages. As Bishop Taylor observes, the analogy of the case of circumcision, which shows that God, under the Mosaic laws accepted during the nonage of the infant, the faith of the parents who brought him to be thus initiated, is quite a sufficient warrant for Christians under the Gospel covenant, in adopting the same system with respect to baptism. We may therefore confidently argue, in opposition to those who would rest the usage of infant baptism upon tradition only, that we have in Scripture as direct a sanction as a strong analogy can afford for our present practice. And we shall be more confirmed in this view of the question when we consider it practically in its results.

Now the expediency of infant baptism (and where an usage appears to be not inconsistent with Scripture, its salutary mode of working must always be considered an additional argument in its favour), may be fairly considered as established, by the moral benefits upon the character which it is found experimentally to produce. A child cannot too soon be made to know that he is "not his own," that "he is bought with a price." If well disposed, he will from the moment that he begins to comprehend the duties of religion, feel a strong additional inducement to a course of early piety, from the consciousness that his regeneration (that is to say, his abjuration of his natural character, and his assumption of that of a servant of Christ) is not a thing which is to take place at some future indefinite period; but that it is already done. That he is actually assigned over to his Redeemer's service; that the old man is already buried in him; and that he is already spiritually risen again with Christ to newness and holiness of life.

Where then the rite of baptism is duly followed up, as the faculties of the mind develop, by a course of piety and obedience, we cannot doubt that our Lord's com-

mand on this subject has been duly and fully obeyed, according to the entire spirit of his intention.

It appears therefore as certain as any other scriptural truth, that the person thus admitted into the Christian covenant, and running his course suitably in it, is accordingly in a state of entire reconciliation with God, and has a claim to all the benefits of the Gospel dispensation. Nor can we doubt that the blessing of the Almighty is upon him, and that the assisting grace of the Holy Spirit will always be ready to aid his endeavours in the pursuit of holiness. Thus far probably all parties within our Church are agreed in their opinions on this subject. But subsequent to this view of the case occurs another important but more difficult question; namely, "What is the exact nature of the spiritual gift conferred at baptism, and how far is it final in itself;" that is to say, how far annexed exclusively to this one ceremony. If the grace which it confers be quenched by the growth of subsequent bad habits, "can it be renewed by repentance; or, once lost, is it extinguished for ever?" This is a fearful question; and respecting it, as is well known, the speculations of different members of our Church are essentially different. The extreme party on the one side consider baptism as one single opportunity offered, in the life of each individual, of reconciliation with God; but if once forfeited by subsequent sin and the violation of the conditions of the Christian covenant, as not reparable at any future period by any process acknowledged by revelation. In other words, this doctrine would assert that all grievous sin after baptism is, so far as we have reason to believe, irremissible: a doctrine so harsh, so practically damnable of nearly the whole human race, and so inconsistent with the declared merciful character of the Gospel system, as compared even with the Levitical, that we

want no further proof of its unsoundness. The extreme opinion on the other side, and which perhaps again can scarcely find its warrant in Scripture, is, that baptism is indeed a rite obligatory upon all Christians, but still merely a form of initiation, necessary, because enjoined by our Saviour, but conveying a divine blessing along with it, not in its own essence, but solely as it chances to be followed up by subsequent holiness of life. We want no further argument against the soundness of this latter view, than that, according to it, a child in that intermediate state between baptism and the development of its own moral sense, would appear to have received no benefit whatever from the ceremony which it has undergone, save that of its formal admission into the Christian community.

With regard to the first mentioned and the harsher of these two opposite views, I would now observe, that if we admit the entire analogy between the rite of circumcision and that of baptism, the doctrine of the irremissibility of sin after baptism falls at once to the ground. If sins were remissible to the Jews after circumcision, then it would follow that they are equally remissible to the Christian after baptism. We know however that the whole machinery of expiatory rites and sacrifices under the Levitical law was enacted for the benefit of circumcised adults, who having fallen into sin, were again and again to be rendered clean in the sight of God by the renewal of their obedience, in the manner and by the ceremonies which the ritual of Moses prescribed. But the ritual expiations of the Jews were confessedly the type of their great Antitype, the one sufficient sacrifice of Christ. Now it can never for a moment be supposed that the mere adumbration, the type, should have a power of reconciling fallen man with God, and that the real substance, the antitype,

should be inefficient for the same purpose;—that the blood of bulls and of goats should be more effectual than that of Christ;—that under the comparatively harsh Levitical system there should be the means of spiritual restoration, after a lapse from grace, held out to the last moment of man's earthly existence, whilst all the hopes of the Christian, under the merciful Gospel dispensation, should be crushed irrecoverably, under circumstances precisely similar. We may add, in confirmation of this view of the question, that although Scripture is silent with respect to the baptism of the Apostles, still we must necessarily infer that it took place during the period of our Lord's ministry on earth. But if so, then they all committed the deadly sin of denying him subsequently to their respective baptisms, and yet, that that sin was forgiven them is perfectly certain from the communications held with them by our Saviour in the interval between his resurrection and ascension. The case of the incestuous person mentioned in both of St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians affords another argument precisely to the same effect.

But now, in the next place, occurs the question, "What is the exact nature of that spiritual gift which we believe to be conferred in baptism?" This query will be differently answered according to men's different temperaments. That there is, however, some important blessing attendant upon the due reception of this rite, cannot for a moment be doubted. The solemnity with which our Lord enjoins its performance is quite decisive upon that point. And yet, on the other hand, as if for the purpose of checking any exaggerated theories on this subject, Scripture alludes to other spiritual gifts, no doubt of great value to the recipient, but still entirely unconnected with the baptismal ceremony.

It seems, indeed, as if almost intended on purpose to

meet the assertion that baptism is the one great, and almost only occasion, in which we may look to obtaining the graces of the Holy Spirit; that in one remarkable passage of the Acts of the Apostles we find the gift of the Holy Ghost *preceding* the conferring of baptism; in another, as not accompanying that rite, but as *subsequent* to it: in both cases, therefore, obviously not dependent upon it. Thus, in the case of the spiritual gift being withheld till after the reception of baptism, we read, "who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them; only they were baptized by the name of the Lord Jesus). Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." (Acts viii. 15-17). And again, in the instance where it preceded baptism, we find the following passage. "Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (Acts x. 46, 47.) The conclusion, then, which we come to, if we look to Scripture alone for our information, is, that baptism in the first place is the seal of our regeneration, and of our admission to the Christian covenant. 2dly. That as such, it gives us a claim to all the conditions of that covenant, so long as we continue in our obedience. That, as being of divine institution, it is necessarily accompanied by some divine blessing not otherwise attainable; and that that blessing is not eventually forfeited in consequence of subsequent transgression, provided the offender turns from his sin in true contrition of heart, and embraces through faith that inexhaustible means of reconciliation still afforded him through the merits and sacrifice of Christ. All speculations further than this,—all attempts to define the exact degree of benefit obtained, and the precise nature of the spiritual

change produced, together with all questions branching out of the same subject, such as the possibility of unbaptized adults, as in the case of the repentant thief, being admitted to salvation, as lying beyond the verge of revelation, appear to me to be at the best inexpedient, and not unfrequently mischievous, from the often contradictory theories, and the want of mutual charity which they produce.

OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

The institution of the Lord's Supper was the adaptation of one of the most remarkable ceremonies of the Mosaic law, established in commemoration of the release of the Jews from Egyptian captivity, to the still more solemn commemorative celebration of the rescue of the whole human race, through the one great Christian sacrifice, from the bondage of sin and death. It was in its primitive form, under the Levitical institutions, a kind of dramatic representation of the hurried departure of the Israelites from the land of their captivity, eating their hasty meal with their travelling staves in their hands, their shoes on their feet, and with their loins girded: the food ordained being the paschal lamb, with its bones unbroken, and its accompaniments bitter herbs and unleavened bread. This ceremony, with the addition of some minor formalities, has been solemnly performed by the Jewish nation during the season of the vernal equinox, from the date of their departure from Egypt down to the present time. In precisely this form, so far as it can be gathered by comparing the narrative of the Evangelists with what we read of the rabbinical ceremonies, it was celebrated by our Saviour on the evening preceding his crucifixion, with such additions only as were necessary for its adaptation to the purposes of the new gospel covenant. A Jewish con-

vert in this country, Mr. Ridley H. Herschell, in a small publication during the last year, has given us a brief sketch of the present state of the Jews; and, amongst other things, has particularized the forms still observed by his countrymen during the supper of the passover. The following extract from his narrative is worth attending to, as it serves to throw considerable light upon the account given by the Evangelists. “*The supper being ended*, two large cups are filled with wine. One of these is taken by the master of the house, and a blessing pronounced. This blessing refers very distinctly to the time of the Messiah’s reign. ‘O most Merciful! make us to inherit the day when all shall be sabbath, and we shall rest in life for ever. O most Merciful! cause us to be inheritors of the day when all shall be good. O most Merciful! make us worthy to see the days of the Messiah and life in the world to come. May He who exalteth the salvation of his king, and showeth mercy to his anointed, to David and his seed for evermore; who causes peace to exist in the heavens, cause his peace to be upon us, and upon all Israel.—Amen.’ This is in strict harmony with the prayer of our Lord: ‘Thy kingdom come: thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.’ After this blessing, the head of the family gives the cup to all those sitting around. He then brings forth the ‘hidden cake,’* and distributes a piece to each. The second cup of wine, called Elijah’s cup, is then placed before him, the door is opened, and a solemn pause of expectation ensues. * * * The passover has been celebrated by the Jews, without intermission, since the Babylonish captivity; and as we are not a people given to adopt modern innovations of

* The cake described in a preceding paragraph, as having been put away during the celebration of the Supper.

any sort, it is probable the mode has never been changed in any other way than by the addition or substitution of different prayers, suited to the state of dispersion, which are to be met with in all the various services, as well as allusions to the sayings of certain eminent men, the date of which is, of course, not difficult to ascertain. It is, therefore, most probable, that our Lord and his disciples, in all the ceremonial part, commemorated it in the same manner as we now do. The custom of dipping the bitter herbs seems to accord with Christ's words, 'He that dippeth with me in the dish.' 'He to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it.' In reading the narratives of the four Evangelists, we must remember they were written by Jews, and that those for whom they were first written were either Jews or the disciples of Jews. None of them, therefore, enter into any detailed account of the services of that evening, but simply allude to them as matters well known. We are not, therefore, to be surprised that the two cups are not mentioned in all the narratives; but to regard the narrative of them by St. Luke as sufficient evidence that they were used. In chap. xxii. 17, it is said, 'He took the cup and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves;' and in v. 20, 'Likewise also the cup *after* supper, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood.' The breaking of the bread being mentioned in connexion with this cup, gives every reason to suppose that it was the hidden cake which our Lord used for this purpose." &c. I have dwelt the longer on these observations respecting the primitive institution of the eucharist, for the following reason. We hear much among the writers of our own Church, to whom I have already alluded, of the *eucharistic sacrifice*; and though I by no means suppose that by this expression the same precise idea is intended to

be conveyed with that of the Romanists when speaking of the sacrifice of the mass, yet we cannot doubt but that the former view of the question is at least an approximation to the doctrine implied by the latter. In short, it is now asserted by members of our own Church, as it has been in former times by the advocates of tradition, that the eucharistic rite is not merely a commemorative act of gratitude for the blessed effects of our Saviour's passion, accompanied by a specific divine blessing on this our bounden duty and service, but that it is also a formal offering for sin of the consecrated elements; an expiatory sacrifice, resembling in its character and in its final object the oblations under the Levitical covenant. Such I presume at least is the idea intended to be conveyed by the word "sacrifice" as used on this subject by the writers to whom I allude. It is far from my intention to overstate, much less to misrepresent their meaning. Now, in reply to this theory, if correctly stated by me, I would observe, that the expiatory sacrifices of the Jews were not the type of the *eucharistic* ceremonial, but of the *actual sacrifice of himself* once, and only once, offered by our blessed Saviour upon the cross. The type, or rather the original ordinance from which the eucharistic supper was derived, was, on the contrary, as has been just now shown, only a commemorative act of gratitude for a signal mercy received, in no one single respect bearing the characteristics of a sacrificial rite in the usual acceptation of that term.* The inference then of course is obvious,—namely, that if the original type was not a sacrifice, (taking that word in its technical and Levitical sense) no more was its

* It is true that in Exodus xii. 27, we find this ceremony designated by Moses as the "*sacrifice of the Lord's Passover*," but the whole context of the narrative shows that no analogy is intended to be implied between this rite and the sacrificial institutions of the Levitical law.

subsequent antitype. Accordingly, we find that neither in the narrative of the Evangelists respecting the first institution of the Eucharist, nor in the passages in the Acts, where this ceremony is spoken of, under the expression of "meeting together for the breaking of bread;" nor in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, where the subject is treated in some detail, is there the slightest allusion to any *sacrificial* notion as connected with this ceremony. That it was solemnly enjoined to the whole Christian community by our Lord at that awful moment which preceded his crucifixion; that it is, of all the religious institutions which the heart of man can conceive, the most touching, as reminding us of our own natural helplessness, and of the vast mercies which we have received through the instrumentality of the divine love; and that by taking our part in this necessary act of obedience, we do, in some degree, approximate to our Saviour, and identify ourselves with him, so far as our nature will permit, both in body and soul: all these, I conceive, are almost self-evident truths. But when we go beyond this point, and teach that the Eucharist is a continually renewed *sacrifice for reconciliation with God, and for the expiation of sin*, then, I think, we are not only deviating from the original institution, and setting up our own fancies in the place of God's ordinances, but we are directly incurring the censure which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews throws upon the expiatory offerings of the Jews: that is to say, by asserting that the one great sacrifice for sin of Christ's body requires a constant renewal, so far from enhancing, we are in fact derogating from the value of that mysterious offering, after the payment of which, the Scripture assures us, that his work accomplished, and our salvation obtained, our gracious Redeemer sate down for ever at the right hand of God.

It is curious to observe in the works of the early Christian writers, by what minute deviations, in search of imaginary *improvement*, the Eucharistic ordinance became gradually bent from its original character, until it finally settled in the Romish Church in that singularly unscriptural ceremony, the sacrifice of the mass. That innovations so slight and apparently so innocent, as those of the more primitive times, should have ultimately led to such a termination, affords us a strong warning of the danger of deviating in the slightest degree from what we find written, and of the necessity of our rigorously scrutinizing even our most pious imaginations the moment that we begin to suspect that we cannot produce for them the sanction of express revelation.

The first allusion which we find in the writings of the early Fathers to any difference of opinion on the subject of the Eucharist, occurs in Ignatius's Epistle to the Smyrnæans, in which he states of the then prevalent heretics the Gnostics, that they abstained from principle from the use of that rite. This was in fact a necessary deduction from the creed of that mistaken sect; inasmuch as denying the reality of our Lord's bodily nature when on earth, they naturally revolted from an institution in which the type of that body was the constituent element.* It is however in the writings of Justin Martyr that we observe the first traces among orthodox Christians of that first commencement of innovation which, beginning in harmlessness of purpose, eventually led men so widely astray from the spirit of the original ordinance. "After the celebration of prayers," says he

* The charge of cannibalism (*ἀνθρωπείων σαρκῶν βορὰ*), so strangely brought against the early Christians by the Pagans, and so indignantly repelled by Justin and others, arose evidently from a misapprehension of the scriptural language respecting the eating the body and blood of Christ.

in his first Apology, "the appointed minister brings forward bread, and a cup of water mingled with wine, and taking it up he gives thanks and glory to the Father of all things, in the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, praising him that he has vouchsafed to think us worthy of these blessings. After which rendering of prayers and of thanksgivings, the whole congregation reply, Amen. When then the Minister has thus given thanks, and the people have thus responded, those whom we call 'Deacons' give to each of the persons present a portion of the elements for which thanks have thus been returned, and *afterwards carry away other portions to those who have not attended at the service.*"* Now at first sight it would seem harsh to criticize the usage of thus communicating to those individuals who might have been prevented from attendance by sickness or any other justifiable plea, their portion of the consecrated elements. And yet, to what a number of successively connected results did this seemingly innocent custom lead! The elements thus taken in charge were of course to be considered as no longer ordinary bread and wine, but as something more especially holy. They were therefore to be handled with respect, and to be received severally with those feelings of real piety mingled with the occasional superadditions of superstitious fancy, which would suggest themselves to invalids in their sick beds, or to the aged at that time of life when the fancy might perhaps have survived the workings of a sound judgment. We cannot wonder that, under such circumstances, the mere bodily contact of the consecrated elements began soon to be considered as the really important part of the ceremony, and the spiritual commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ, according to

* Apologia i. cap. 65.

the original institution, to be in some degree lost sight of. It is, however, in the still later writings of Irenæus that we find the first germ* of the subsequently prevalent idea of considering the Eucharistic rite not so much as a commemoration of an event, and an act of humble obedience, as of a *sacrifice*. Still the sacrifice which this last-mentioned Father supposes is not after all that of our Lord's typical body, much less that of the supposed transubstantiated body asserted by the Romanists, but merely what was denominated the unbloody sacrifice of bread and wine; a mere offering of gratitude to the Almighty, in return for his many gifts of temporal mercy to his creatures. "Our Lord," says he, "setting us the example of offering to God the first fruits of his creatures, not as though He stood in need of our gifts, but merely that we might not appear ungrateful, took up the creature 'bread,' and returned thanks, saying, 'This is my body,' and also, with respect to the creature 'the cup,' he designated it as his blood, and declared it to be the oblation of the new covenant; which, the Church receiving as an usage from the Apostles throughout the world, still offers to God; namely, the first fruits of his gifts, according to the new covenant, to Him who gives us our sustenance."† This idea Irenæus supports by the following

* I cannot think that the word "altar," as it occurs in the epistles of Ignatius, has any reference to the idea of *sacrifice*, as involved in the Eucharistic ceremony. The meaning which Ignatius appears to me to intend to convey by this term, would perhaps be best rendered by our expression "Church," as designating a body of men held together by a common religion. It was a term adopted by him from the Levitical and the Pagan usages, and applied, as I conceive, figuratively to the Christian forms of worship. It is surely in this sense that we must understand him in the following passage from his Epistle to the Trallians: "He that is within the altar is pure; but he that is without, *that is, that does any thing without the Bishop and Presbyters and Deacons*, is not pure in his conscience."

† "Sed et suis discipulis dans consilium primitias Deo offerre ex suis creaturis, non quasi indigenti, sed ut ipsi nec infructuosi nec ingrati sint, cum qui ex creaturâ

quotation from Malachi: "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering." (Mal. i. 11.)

That this view, however, of the nature of the Eucharistic rite did not prevail generally in the Church, even for some time after the age of Irenæus, is evident from what we find asserted positively by Minucius Felix, in his well known dialogue entitled "Octavius." In this work, which is supposed to have been written about the period of the reign of Alexander Severus, we find an heathen disputant alleging in depreciation of the Christian worship, that it was a religion which possessed *no altars*, no public temples, and no images. "*Nullas aras habent, templa nulla, nulla nota simulacra.*" Now, the reply of the Christian adversary is not a denial, but an admission of this fact, which he justifies from the reason of the case. "Putatis nos occultare quod colimus, si delubra et *aras non habemus*? Quid enim simulacrum Deo fingam, cum, si rectè existimes, sit Dei homo ipse simulacrum? Templum quid ei extruam, cum totus hic mundus ejus opere fabricatus eum capere non possit? et, cum homo latiùs maneam, intra unam ædiculam vim tantæ majestatis includam? Nonne meliùs in nostrà dedicandus est mente, in imo consecrandus est pectore? *Hostias et Victimæ* Domino offeram, quas in usum mei protulit, ut rejiciam ei suum munus? Ingratum est; *cum sit litabilis hostia, bonus animus et pura mens et sincera conscientia.* . . . *Hæc nostra sacrificia, hæc*

panis est, accepit et gratias egit, dicens, 'Hoc est corpus meum.' Et calicem similiter qui est ex eâ creaturâ quæ est secundum nos, suum sanguinem confessus est, et novi testamenti novam docuit oblationem. Quam Ecclesia ab Apostolis accipiens in universo mundo, offert Deo; ei qui alimenta nobis præstat, primitias suorum munerum in novo testamento." Adversus Hæres. lib. iv. cap. 32.

Dei sacra sunt." Can we want a stronger proof that the Eucharistic *oblation* did not form a part of the belief of the person who could write the above passage? In the writings of Cyprian we find, it is true, the Eucharistic ceremony continually spoken of under the appellation of the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ: and yet, strong as this expression may at first sight appear, it is evident, from the incidental explanation of his opinions on this subject which meet us from time to time in his works, that this form of speech is intended by him only in a figurative sense, and not as implying any belief whatever in what is called the doctrine of the "real presence." That he conceived the ceremony to be in a certain sense "sacrificial" must be necessarily admitted, but it is at the same time clear that he considered the sacrifice thus offered to be the bloodless oblation of bread and wine according to the view already attributed to Irenæus, and to have no reference whatever to the transmutation of the original elements into our Lord's actual body and blood. Thus in his tract on "Works of Mercy" he reproaches a rich but covetous female with the meanness of partaking of the Eucharistic rite without making her own contribution towards the procuring the holy elements, and thus, without making any *sacrifice* herself, availing herself of the *sacrifice* of her poorer brethren. "Locuples et dives es, et dominicum celebrare te credis, quæ 'corban' omnino non respicis; quæ in dominicum *sine sacrificio* venis; quæ partem *de sacrificio quod pauper obtulit* sumis." De opere et eleemosynis, cap. 3. Again, in the 75th Epistle of his correspondence we find a passage which appears to assert in language the most explicit, the *figurative* meaning of the terms "body and blood" as used by our Redeemer at his last supper. "Nam quando Dominus corpus suum *panem vocat* de multorum granorum adunatione congestum, *populum*

nostrum quem portabat indicat adunatum: et quando sanguinem suum vinum appellat de botris atque acinis plurimis expressum atque in unum coactum, gregem item nostrum significat commixtione adunatæ multitudinis copulatum." In the 62d Epistle again occurs, if possible, a still stronger passage, which, as it appears to me, can by no interpretation, however strained, be supposed compatible with the doctrine of the real transmutation of the Eucharistic elements. He is writing to express his disapprobation of the strange usage which prevailed in some Churches, of consecrating the sacramental cup with simple water only. This practice he observes is in direct contradiction to the primitive institution, our Saviour, as he asserts, having at his last supper presented to his disciples a *mixed* cup, of water blended with wine. Under this alleged mixture of wine and water he conceives that a deep mystery is intended to be conveyed. The *wine* of course he considers as representing the blood of Christ; the *water*, from a fanciful application of a passage in the Apocalypse, ch. xvii. 16, he assumes to express the human race. Thus, he proceeds, by the union of wine and water in the same cup we signify the unity which exists between Christ and his earthly followers. "If then," says he, "we consecrate *water only*, we present a cup containing the human race without the accompaniment of Christ: if we consecrate *wine only*, then we present a cup containing Christ detached from the human race. But by the union of *both*, a spiritual and heavenly sacrifice is consummated." Now it is clear, according to this rather singular argument, that either a *double* transmutation, or *no transmutation at all* must be necessarily implied. If the *wine* is really converted into our Lord's blood, then must the *water* be also converted into the human race. If on the other hand the *water* only *typically*

represents mankind, then the *wine* must, by a parity of inference, only *typically* represent the blood of Christ. Common reason at once rejects the supposition that half of this statement should be taken figuratively, and the other half literally. That the human race *in idea*, and the blood of Christ *in substance* should be capable of forming one common mixture. The following is the original passage. “Aquas populos significare, in Apocalypsi scriptura divina declarat, dicens, ‘Aquæ quas vidisti, super quas sedit meretrix illa, populi et turbæ et gentes ethnicorum sunt et linguæ.’ Quod scilicet perspicimus et in sacramento calicis contineri. Nam quia nos omnes portabat Christus, qui et peccata nostra portabat, videmus in aquâ populum intelligi, in vino vero ostendi sanguinem Christi. Quando autem in calice vino aqua miscetur, Christo populus adunatur, et credentium plebs ei in quem credidit copulatur et conjungitur. Quæ copulatio et conjunctio aquæ et vini sic miscetur in calice Domini, ut commixtio illa non possit ab invicem separari. * * * Sic in sanctificando calice Domini offerri aqua sola non potest, quomodo nec vinum solum potest. Nam si vinum tantum quis offerat, *sanguis Christi incipit esse sine nobis*. Si vero aqua sit sola, *plebs incipit esse sine Christo*. Quando autem utrumque miscetur et adunatione confusâ sibi invicem copulatur, tunc sacramentum spiritale et cœleste perficitur. Sic vero calix Domini non est aqua sola aut vinum solum, nisi utrumque sibi misceatur, quomodo nec corpus Domini potest esse farina sola, aut aqua sola, nisi utrumque adunatum fuerit et copulatum, et panis unius compage solidatum. Quo et ipso sacramento *populus noster ostenditur adunatus*, ut quemadmodum grana multa in unum collecta et commolita et commixta panem unum faciunt, sic in Christo, qui est panis cœlestis, *unum sciamus esse corpus cui conjunctus sit noster numerus et adunatus*.”

The notion of a *sacrifice*, being thus once annexed to the celebration of our Lord's Supper, the idea was, after no long interval, as might be expected, enlarged upon and *improved* by subsequent speculators. In the Apology of Julius Firmicus, addressed to the Emperors Constans and Constantius, we find indeed our Lord's Supper described in language which any Protestants of the present day might adopt, as strictly scriptural;* but certain it is, that early in the fourth century, the expression of the "sacrifice of the Eucharist" began to be generally adopted; and before the close of that century the opinion of the Church on this point had nearly entirely assimilated itself to that of the modern Romanists. Thus, for instance, we find Augustine, in terms which surely no Protestant would acknowledge as orthodox, describing the celebration of it at his mother Monica's funeral, for the benefit of the soul of the deceased. At

* I subjoin the following specimen of his manner. He has been describing the Heathen ceremonies connected with the worship of Ceres and Bacchus, and thus proceeds: "Alius est cibus qui salutem largitur et vitam: alius est cibus qui hominem summo Deo commendat et reddit: alius est cibus qui languentes relevat, errantes revocat, lapsos erigit, qui morientibus æternæ immortalitatis largitur insignia. Christi panem, Christi poculum quære, ut terrenâ fragilitate contemptâ, substantia hominis immortalis pabulo saginetur. Quid est autem hic panis, vel quod poculum? de quo in libris Solomonis Sapientia magnâ voce proclamatur. Ait enim, 'Venite et manducate de meis panibus, et bibite vinum quod miscui.' Et Melchisedech Rex Salem, et sacerdos summi Dei, revertenti Abrahæ cum pane et vino benedictionis obtulit gratiam. . . . Ut autem manifestius diceretur quinam ille esset panis per quem miseræ mortis vincuntur exitia, ipse Dominus sancto venerando ore signavit; ne per diversos tractatus spes hominum pravis interpretationibus fallerentur. Dicit enim in Evangelio Joannis, 'Ego sum panis vitæ; qui venerit ad me non esuriet, et qui in me crediderit, non sitiet unquam.' Item in sequentibus hoc idem simili modo significat: ait enim, 'Si quis sitit, veniat et bibat, qui credat in me.' Et rursus ipse, ut majestatis suæ substantiam credentibus traderet, ait, 'Nisi edieritis carnem Filii hominis, et biberitis sanguinem ejus, non habetis vitam in vobis.' Quare nihil vobis sit cum tympanis, cibi odio miseri mortales; salutaris cibi gratiam quærite, et immortale poculum bibite. Christus vos epulis suis revocat ad lucem, et gravi veneno putres artus et torpescencia membra vivificat. Cœlesti cibo renovate hominem perditum, ut quicquid in vobis mortuum est, divinis beneficiis renascatur," &c. De Errore Prof. Relig.

so early a period had human invention overgrown and superseded the original enactments of Scripture! "Cum, ecce corpus elatum est. Imus, et redimus sine lachrymis. Nam neque in eis precibus, quas tibi fudimus, *cum tibi offerretur pro ea sacrificium pretii nostri*, juxta sepulchrum posito cadavere, priusquam deponeretur, sicut illic fieri solet, nec in eis precibus flevi."* Although, however, in writing the above passage, Augustine appears to have intended, and probably did really intend, to convey a sentiment nearly in entire accordance with the present Romish doctrine respecting the Eucharist, such by no means seems to have been his uniform and steady opinion. So long as any particular doctrine is only in its growth and progress, the same individual will often be found at one time to express notions inconsistent with those which he may have entertained at another, according to the circumstances which may chance to recommend at the moment the older or the more recent theory most strongly to his mind. The following short extracts from the work "*De Civitate Dei*" will, I think, show, that there were occasions in which Augustine seems to have coincided entirely with the received Protestant doctrine, and instead of considering the sacrifice of the Eucharist as the oblation of *our Saviour's transmuted body*, would have literally assented to the supplication contained in our own established ritual, in which the Communicants "offer and present *themselves, their souls and bodies*, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice" to God. Thus, in chapter iii. of the 10th book we read, "Cum ad illum sursum est, ejus est altare cor nostrum: ejus Unigenito cum Sacerdote placamus: ei cruentas victimas cædimus, quando usque ad sanguinem pro ejus veritate certamus;

* Confessionum, lib. ix. cap. 4.

ei suavissimum adolemus incensum, cum in ejus conspectu pio sanctoque amore flagramus.” Again, chapter 5, 6. “Quæcunque igitur in ministerio tabernaculi sive templi multis modis de sacrificiis leguntur divinitus esse præcepta, ad dilectionem Dei et proximi significandam referuntur: ‘in his enim duobus præceptis,’ ut scriptum est ‘tota lex pendet et prophetæ.’ Proinde verum sacrificium est omne opus quod agitur, ut sanctâ societate inhæreamus Deo. . . . Cum igitur vera sacrificia opera sint misericordiæ, sive in nos ipsos, sive in proximos, quæ referuntur ad Deum; opera vero misericordiæ non ob aliud fiant nisi ut a miseriâ liberemur, ac per hoc ut beati simus . . . profecto efficitur ut tota ipsa redempta Civitas, hoc est, *Congregatio Societasque sanctorum universale sacrificium offeratur Deo per Sacerdotem magnum*, qui etiam se ipsum obtulit in passione pro nobis, ut tanti capitis corpus essemus, secundum formam servi. *Hanc* enim obtulit: in hâc oblatus est; quia secundum hanc Mediator est, in hâc sacerdos, in hâc sacrificium est. . . . Quod etiam sacramento altaris fidelibus noto frequentat Ecclesia; ut ei demonstretur quod *in eâ re quam offert, ipsa offeratur*.” And again, chapter 20. “Unde verus ille Mediator, in quantum formam servi accipiens Mediator effectus est Dei et hominum homo Christus Jesus, cum in formâ Dei sacrificium cum Patre sumat, cum quo et unus Deus est, tamen in formâ servi sacrificium maluit esse quàm sumere, ne vel hâc occasione quisquam existimaret cuilibet sacrificandum esse creaturæ. Per hoc, et Sacerdos est, ipse offerens, ipse et oblatio. *Cujus rei sacramentum quotidianum esse voluit Ecclesiæ sacrificium; quæ, cum ipsius capitis corpus sit, se ipsam per ipsum discit offerre*.” From the age of Augustine downwards, however, the progress of innovation was rapid. Ascetics and Mystics added year after year their almost

daily contributions of fantastic speculations and miraculous legends, which were greedily adopted by the ignorant and the credulous, until at length the monstrous doctrine of transubstantiation,* with all its strange and revolting consequences, became the established creed of the whole Christian world.

What then, it may be asked, is the blessed Eucharist, after all, a mere commemorative ceremony, involving no special mystery, and conveying no peculiar spiritual grace? Are the bread and wine after consecration still mere bread and wine unchanged in their nature, and endued with no special sanctity? I answer, let us confine ourselves within the range of Scripture, and we shall acquire all the knowledge upon this subject which is really necessary for us. The same remark which has already been made on the question of baptism, will apply equally on this occasion. The performance of this rite has been positively enjoined by our Divine Master; the mode of its celebration has been intelligibly taught us by Him; and we may, therefore, be perfectly certain, that if we perform it according to the instructions we have received from Him, the divine grace and blessing annexed to this act of solemn duty and worship will inevitably follow. "This do in remembrance of me," was our Lord's parting command. The words are at once clear, and pregnant with meaning. We are to approach the holy table with hearts warmed with the remembrance of Him; that is to say, with recollections of our own originally lost nature; of all that we have

* The Romanists urge that our Saviour's expression, "This is my body, this is my blood," must necessarily be understood *literally*. They forget that, according to St. Matthew's statement, *after* the benediction of the cup, when he had designated it as his *blood*, he still continued to call it "*the fruit of the vine*." Surely the latter expression requires to be taken at least as much in a literal sense as the former.

done and thought amiss; of our wanderings, our rebellions, our worldliness, our ingratitude; and we are to set this consciousness of our own total want of desert against all that He has done and suffered for us. We are, by eating and drinking the visible representations of that holy body and blood which were sacrificed for us, to awaken our feelings of humble gratitude, and to learn and strive, so far as human nature will permit, to assimilate ourselves to Him who put on himself the form of man for our sake, and to run our course as regenerate beings, redeemed by that act of mercy from the dominion of sin.* Now can we seriously assert, that obedience to a command imposing upon us this course of holy duty, is inadequate to the wants of our spiritual constitution, or unworthy of Him for whom we received it? Shall we, I ask, be adding to, or diminishing from its solemnity and its salutary operation, by building up, and superadding to it our own arbitrary definitions and unauthorized speculations? Look at the Romanist attending the sacrifice of the mass. He kneels before the altar, an almost indifferent spectator, trusting that the mysterious ceremony of which he is an eye-witness, but in the performance of which he has no personal share, will some way or other operate to the redemption of his soul and the expiation of his sins. Look at the Protestant approaching with reverence to partake of those expressive elements which remind him, by tokens more heart-stirring than any power of language can convey, of what he might have been, and of what he humbly

* The above paragraph beginning, with the words, "The performance of this rite"—down to "dominion of sin," has been quoted at length by the British Critic of April 1839, with "*earnest sorrow*" at its *serious and lamentable laxity of doctrinal statements!*" On what ground the anonymous critic founds this sweeping and severe censure, I am quite at a loss to imagine. Let the impartial reader decide between us.

trusts that he now is, through the vast expiation which has been made for him. Surely no external ceremony, no pomp or solemnity of worship, no inculcation of an unscriptural and inconceivable mystery in the former case, can afford any compensation for the extinction or diminution of that spiritual worship of the heart which a due participation in the holy Eucharist, according to the terms of our Lord's original institution, is so well calculated to encourage. Keeping ourselves within Scripture, I repeat, we must do right. Calling in the aid of tradition, we can scarcely fail to go wrong. The mind will grow dizzy in wandering through its own mazes. Speculation will lead to speculation; and beneath every presumed mystery a still deeper mystery will unfold itself, until the most soul-stirring ordinance of our religion will become a mere riddle for the employment of the controversialist; and all the captious, not to say most *unseemly* questions, which almost necessarily grow out of the theory of transubstantiation, will occupy the place of the most holy aspirations which our mortal nature is capable of entertaining.

OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

The Church of Christ being a community of human beings, professing to conform to a given rule for the attainment of a definite object, it seems to follow, as a matter of course, that such a body can be kept duly together, and be made to act consistently with reference to that object, only by the establishment of a legitimate and graduated authority. This is so self-evident, that the case of ecclesiastical government would appear to require no other arguments in its favour than those which are universally acknowledged to apply to civil. But we are not left to arrive at this conclusion by inference only. We learn from Scripture that three distinct

grades of spiritual officers existed in the apostolic age,—namely, apostles, who undertook the general superintendence of the Church; presbyters, to whom was entrusted the office of exhortation and teaching; and deacons, acting in the capacity of subordinate ministers, and training themselves by taking their part in the spiritual instruction of the laity, for promotion to the higher office of presbyter. Thus far, with the additional fact that the appointment of these respective officers was a solemn act of the assembled Church, invoking the blessing of the Holy Spirit, the book of the Acts, and the Epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus, expressly teach us. The only remaining questions then are,—first, “whether the graduated form of Church government which we find sanctioned by revelation, is binding upon the Christian community in all future ages;” and, secondly, “what is the nature and degree of the spiritual power and authority which the act of ordination may be supposed to confer upon the parties receiving it. The mere statement of these questions, it is evident, at once opens the door to an infinite variety of speculations. All these, however, it will of course be impossible for me to pursue in detail; I must, therefore, attempt to treat them only in a summary manner.

Let me then observe, in the first place, that, as the threefold order of “apostles, presbyters, and deacons,” is decidedly acknowledged in Scripture, a strong “*a priori*” argument exists for our preference of this peculiar form of Church government to any other. We know that *it* at least has received the divine sanction, but we cannot confidently assert the same of any of those various forms of discipline which later times have produced. Again, before we abandon what is already established by so high authority, in favour of innovations, however plausible, we are bound, in common

propriety, to show, that what we thus surrender has either failed from the first to accomplish its professed object, or from the change of manners and the effects of time has necessarily become useless and obsolete. Another, and a strong argument for retaining the Church discipline established and transmitted to us by the Apostles, is found in the fact, that religion comes to us in the form of a coercion and restraint; that it is a remedy emanating from an external source, for the correction of the dearest and most besetting sins and infirmities of human nature; and that, under such circumstances, it would be absurd to suppose that any communities of men, if left to the free choice of their respective spiritual teachers, would do otherwise than prefer the preachers of smooth things, to the inculcators of the terrors and threats of sound revelation. For these obvious reasons, (and abundance of others might be adduced,) it would seem to be self-evident that the form of Church government which our own country retained, when, together with a large portion of Europe, she threw off the yoke of the Church of Rome, is immeasurably the safest. All that can be said of other modes of discipline is, that they *may* be right. Of our own it appears certain, that, at all events, it *is* right. Our Saviour, indeed, has declared generally, that "where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them;" and this declaration may, I admit, be quoted, as affording a probable sanction to other modes of Church discipline than our own, when adopted upon conscientious principles. It is, accordingly, under the authority of this text, that I am inclined to hope that the assemblies of those other denominations of Christians, who, from no love of schism, but from a sincere wish to approximate nearer to the simplicity of the primitive ages, have seceded

from our community, may still find favour in his sight. But still, I repeat, the preponderance of argument and probability is very much in favour of our more apostolic and scriptural Church. And with this conviction we may surely rest satisfied, without feeling it our duty to censure those who conscientiously think otherwise.

But now follows the perplexing question, respecting the exact degree and nature of the power entrusted by Christ to his priesthood. On this point the members of our own Establishment are known to entertain very different and almost contradictory opinions. Some, adopting the high principles and notions of the Church of Rome, consider the presbyter or priest as a kind of intermediate agent between God and man : as one who alone can intercede effectively in prayer for the people ; as one without whose direct agency the sacraments would lose their effect ; and one who possesses the power of authoritatively loosening and tying, of pardoning or retaining the sins of those committed to his care. Others there are who explain away all these high views, and look upon the priest merely as the person appointed for the maintenance of good order and uniformity of worship ; the effect of whose ministerial labours must depend entirely upon the good disposition and spiritual-mindedness of his respective hearers. Now it is evident that, in order to decide between these conflicting opinions, we must have recourse to Scripture only. On no one subject perhaps ought mere uninspired human nature to be less trusted than in this, which involves so many questions of personal ambition on the one hand, with so many feelings of timidity and superstition on the other. We all learn from daily experience how much there is of what has been called natural Popery within us. Alarmed by the terrors of another world, men cling instinctively to

each other, and try to find in some authorized minister from heaven that encouragement which they cannot find in their own breasts. Like despairing invalids, they are ready to adopt every remedy, good or bad, which comes plausibly recommended to them. No wonder then, that, under such circumstances, one set of human beings has been ready, from one set of motives, to accept, and to believe in the legitimacy of that authority which has been voluntarily tendered to them; whilst others, from equally natural causes, have willingly submitted to a spiritual servitude of their own creation.

Now, that the feelings which I am here describing did come into play at an early period of the Church may be reasonably inferred from the following fact. The Apostles appointed only three grades of church rulers, of which the lowest, the Deacons, were strictly, as their name demonstrates, "Ministers," persons appointed to perform the humblest functions connected with instruction in spiritual things. But this unassuming simplicity of the apostolical age was of short duration. It was not long before this latter office, which was originally one of humility, came to be considered one of dignity. The Deacon, from a servant rose gradually into the situation of an important functionary in the church; and as he ascended, the superior orders of course rose with him. Hence, all the three ranks of the hierarchy became in the course of time so far uplifted, as it would appear, above their primitive level, as to leave below the lowest a kind of vacant space, which was successively filled up by the more modern orders of sub-deacon, door-keeper, exorcist, reader, and acolyth. Thus we are told, when about the middle of the fourth century Hilary of Poitiers encouraged the celebrated Martin of Tours to take upon himself the office

of deacon, his humility revolted from the assumption of what was then considered so high a post, and that he could be persuaded to undertake no more exalted a position than that of exorcist. Now it cannot, I think, be denied that the introduction of these new officers into the church is indicative of the fact, that the three original orders had in some degree overstepped that position and rank allotted to them in the days of the Apostles. If then we contemplate the circumstances of their office, according to the notions of later times, we view them in a false position. In order to learn exactly what is the degree of legitimate authority to which these three classes of church governors are strictly entitled, we must, I repeat, have recourse to Scripture only, and not to the uncertain and deceptive light afforded by tradition.

Now we must observe, in the first place, that in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, St. Paul confines his directions for the conduct of Presbyters and Deacons to their modes of exhortation, of teaching, and of their general government of God's household; making no allusion whatever to what, in theological language, is usually called "the power of the keys;" in other words, the power of absolution, and the exercise of those higher functions which by many persons are supposed to be conveyed to the clergy at their ordination. In accordance with this view, we nowhere find the Christian minister designated in the New Testament by any of those terms which are used to express the office of *Priest* in its Levitical sense; namely, that of a "sacrificulus" or intercessor, between God and man on the behalf of the congregation. On the contrary, it is expressly asserted that the High Priest of the Christian covenant, analogous to the High Priest of the Mosaical law, is no less a being than our Lord himself, whilst the earthly hierarchy are styled, according to their

respective offices, by the simple titles of Bishop or Overseer, Elder or Presbyter, Deacon or Minister. Thus far nothing can be more clear and explicit than the information afforded us by Scripture. To the subsequent introduction of what are called the inferior orders, such as they are still retained in the Church of Rome, into the Christian hierarchy, I have already adverted. This change bespeaks clearly a serious innovation in the form of ecclesiastical government, and strongly marks that gradual deviation from the exclusive authority and sanctions of Scripture which commenced at so early a period of the Church history, and which in after times attained to so portentous an height. Cyprian, a person not at all disposed in most points to undervalue the spiritual privileges of his office, speaks in great detail in various parts of his writings of the forms of ordination observed in his day, and of the division of their respective functions and authority among the different grades of the ministry. From his statements we learn that, whilst the act of consecration or of ordination appears to have been then exercised almost exclusively by the Bishop, the election to the several orders of the Church, from the lowest up to the very highest, previous to consecration, was made by the almost universal suffrage of the assembled clergy and laity. Thus in the 23d Epistle of his correspondence we find him apologizing to his Presbyters and Deacons, that under an urgent necessity he had ventured to ordain to the very humble offices of Sub-deacon and Reader, Saturus and Optatus, without the consent of the whole body of clergy obtained at the moment, and pleading as his excuse that these two persons had been approved of as candidates for the ministry at the last general assemblage of their community. Again, in the 32d Epistle, he justifies himself in like manner to the

clergy and laity for having, without their previous consent being obtained, admitted Aurelius to the office of Reader, in consequence of the testimony which he had borne to the Christian faith in banishment and on the rack. Again, in the 67th Epistle, we find him asserting the necessity of obtaining the consent of the *whole* Christian community of the respective Churches to the several distinct acts of consecration to the episcopal office, or of ordination to the rank of presbyter or deacon. The following are his own words. “Quod et ipsum videmus de divinâ auctoritate descendere, ut Sacerdos plebe præsentē sub omnium oculis deligatur, et dignus atque idoneus publico iudicio ac testimonio comprobetur.” Again, “Coram omni synagogâ jubet Deus constitui Sacerdotem, id est, instruit et ostendit ordinationes sacerdotales non nisi sub populi assistentis conscientiâ fieri oportere, ut plebe præsentē vel detegantur malorum crimina, vel bonorum merita prædicentur, et sit ordinatio justa et legitima quæ omnium suffragio et iudicio fuerit examinata. Quod postea secundum divina magisteria observatur in Actis Apostolorum: . . . nec hoc in episcoporum tantum et sacerdotum sed et in diaconorum ordinationibus observasse apostolos animadvertimus,” &c. Some light traces of this usage, it will be remembered, still exists, though almost as mere matters of form, in our own church. Such then being the form of Church government established in the Apostolic period, and such the first modifications which it underwent in the primitive ages, the question still remains “what was the degree and nature of the authority which these different grades in the Christian ministry must be admitted to have possessed?” If the observation which has already been made respecting the abolition in the gospel scheme of every thing resembling the Levitical Priesthood of the old covenant be

correct, then indeed an important part of this question appears to have been answered, and it would seem that discipline, prayer, the instruction of the laity, and the preservation of good order in the ceremonials of public worship constitute, and have ever constituted much the larger portion of the duties annexed to the clerical office. Still it would be presumptuous in me, were I to hazard the opinion that no spiritual gifts or privileges attach to the Christian ministry beyond those here stated. The totally detached and distinct character of the clergy as set apart from the laity from the very earliest ages of the Church, would certainly appear to announce something more; especially as the momentous question next presents itself, whether or not the parting injunctions of our Saviour to his Apostles before his ascension, and the power which he then conferred upon *them*, were intended to descend in like manner to their successors in the Church through all future ages. In a certain sense, and under a precautionary protest against any assumption by man of authority not expressly recognised in Scripture, this query must, I think, be answered in the affirmative. It appears to me, for instance, that with respect to the due administration of the Sacraments, whether we look merely to the point of discipline, decency, and order, or take higher and more controverted ground, the performance of these solemn ordinances does belong exclusively to the clerical office. Both the rites of baptism and of the eucharist require of necessity the superintendence of some one person to direct their due performance; and it appears to follow naturally, from plain reason and the analogy of revelation, that such superintendence falls necessarily into the province of the duly ordained minister. Any interference of the laity on those points would appear, therefore, to be an act of unauthorized presumption, contumacious to the

discipline and usefulness of the Church, and of course offensive to God. But still, what shall we say to the yet higher claim asserted by many theologians to the power of absolution? This is a far more difficult and more questionable point. My own views and opinions are as follow. I conceive the usage of confession of our sins and weaknesses to each other (if we suppose it done in full sincerity, for the purpose of obtaining an unbiassed opinion respecting our spiritual state, and of receiving consolation and encouragement in our attempts to recover our lost road to a holy life,) to constitute one of the best and most salutary exercises of which our nature is capable. No man is actually a good judge of his own spiritual condition. From an over-sanguine or an over-anxious temperament, we are all apt to put either too high or too low an estimate upon ourselves. The mind of some indifferent person, if that person is one who is directed solely by kind, compassionate, yet firm and uncompromising Christian principles, is assuredly the best point of appeal to which we can have recourse for obtaining that reasonable degree of consolation and exhortation which our case requires. Is it then an improbable supposition that God has really annexed a blessing to a course of moral training thus salutary, as it undoubtedly would be where the sincerity, good intention, and sound judgment of both parties, of the penitent and of the referee, were such as they should be? "What you loose upon earth shall be loosed in heaven." Does not this expression authorize us to believe that the comfort and assurance of pardon which, relying upon the merciful tenour of Scripture, we venture to hold out to an erring but repentant brother, will really be ratified by the Almighty himself? I own, I see nothing arrogant in this assumption. It was just in this spirit that the Apostle Paul dealt with the incen-

tuous person mentioned in his Epistles to the Corinthians. That man had been living in an open state of incest; and St. Paul, after severely reprimanding his church for their connivance at sin of this deep character, called upon them to show their own abhorrence of the guilt of the offender, as well as to hold out a salutary lesson to himself, by withdrawing for the present from all intercourse with him. The order was obeyed, and the culprit was accordingly brought to a deep sense of his own criminality. Then it was that the Apostle's language assumed another character. He did not, however, pronounce over him a solemn and formal absolution, authoritatively remitting his sins, but he did what is much more seemly in a frail human being, and more in conformity with the tenour of Scripture: he called upon the Corinthian brethren to restore to him the offices of friendship; to comfort him for what was past; and to prevent his falling into despair, by holding out to him the hopes of pardon as afforded by the Gospel. The same just and reasonable view of the extent of the power of sacerdotal absolution appears from the statements of Cyprian to have prevailed in the Christian church, at all events as late as the middle of the third century. According to this writer, the Church seems to have considered itself as possessing the power of *absolute and plenary remission of sins only once in the life of each individual*; that is to say, *at the time of his or her baptism*. That rite conveying, as Scripture teaches, a complete regeneration of the old man, and the putting off the former corrupt nature, an entire abolition of the consequences of all previous transgression was necessarily supposed to be accomplished by it. This opinion the Nicene Council subsequently confirmed by the admission into its creed of the article of belief "in one baptism for the remission of sins." The period of bap-

tism being however once passed, it would not appear from the authority just quoted, that the clergy of that early age considered themselves as invested with any authority to condemn or to absolve, beyond the external ceremony of excommunication from the society of the Church in the case of any heavy delinquency, and of re-admission to it upon the exhibition of sufficient proofs of repentance on the part of the offender, accompanied with earnest prayers to the Almighty that he, who can alone judge of the inward state of the heart, would according to the sincerity of the penitent's contrition, ratify the sentence of reconciliation which his Church now ventured to pronounce. Thus, in the book "De Lapsis," we read, "Quæso, vos, fratres, acquiescite salubribus remediis, consiliis obedite melioribus; cum lacrymis nostris vestras lacrymas jungite; cum nostro gemitu vestros gemitus copulate. Rogamus vos, ut pro vobis Deum rogare possimus. Preces ipsas ad vos prius vertimus, quibus Deum pro vobis, ut misereatur, oramus. . . . Potest ille indulgentiam dare; sententiam suam potest ille deflectere. Pœnitenti operanti, roganti potest clementer ignoscere, potest *in acceptum referre quicquid pro talibus et petierint martyres et fecerint sacerdotes.*" Again, in Epistle 51, whilst recommending the pronouncing the forgiveness of the Church over penitents at the point of death, he adds, "Neque enim præjudicamus Domino judicaturò quominus, si pœnitentiam plenam et justam peccatoris invenerit, *tunc ratum faciat quod a nobis fuerit hic statutum*: si vero nos aliquis pœnitentiæ simulatione deluserit, Deus, qui non deridetur, et qui cor hominis intuetur, de his quæ nos minus perspeximus judicet, *et servorum suorum sententiam Dominus emendet.*" And again, in Epistle 74. "Lapsis quoque fratribus, et post lavacrum salutare a diabolo vulneratis, per pœnitentiam medela quæratur:

non quasi a nobis remissionem peccatorum consequantur, sed ut per nos ad intelligentiam delictorum suorum convertantur, et Domino plenius satisfacere cogantur."

To such sentiments as the above no Protestant surely could find any thing to object. They appear replete with good sense and true piety. Let our Church, or let any Church adopt such reasonable and evangelical discipline as this, and the usage of confession and absolution will become one of its brightest and most valuable ornaments.* But not so has human arrogance on one hand, and superstition on the other, thought proper to adopt them. Mortal agency, and a new set of mediators between God and man, have been called in, as if for the sole purpose of interrupting that direct intercourse of the contrite sinner with the Redeemer and Creator to which the Gospel would invite him. The divine mercy

* The sentiments here expressed on the subject of confession and absolution, are in near accordance with those of Calvin, as conveyed in the third book of his Institutes, chap. 4. sect. 12. "Tametsi Jacobus (Jac. v. 16) neminem nominatim assignando, in cujus sinum nos exoneremus, liberum permittit delectum, ut ei confiteamur, qui ex ecclesiæ grege maximè idoneus fuerit visus; quia tamen pastores præ aliis ut plurimum judicandi sunt idonei, potissimum etiam nobis eligendi erunt. Dico autem ideo præ aliis appositos, quòd ipsa ministerii vocatione nobis a Domino designantur, quorum ex ore erudiamur ad subigenda et corrigenda peccata, tum consolationem ex veniæ fiduciâ percipiamus.

"Quemadmodum enim mutæ admonitionis et correctionis officium Christianis quidem omnibus demandatum est, ministris tamen specialiter est injunctum: sic quum omnes mutuo nos debeamus consolari, et in fiduciâ divinæ misericordiæ confirmare, videmus tamen ministros ipsos, ut de remissione peccatorum certiores reddant conscientias, testes ejus ac sponsores constitui, adeo ut ipsi dicantur remittere peccata et animas solvere. Quum audis hoc illis tribui, in usum tuum esse cogita. Ergo id officii sui unusquisque fidelium esse meminerit, si ita privatim angitur et afflicatur peccatorum sensu, ut se explicare nisi alieno adjutorio nequeat, non negligere quod illi a Domino offertur remedium; nempe, ut ad se sublevandum privatâ confessione apud suum pastorem utatur, ac ad solatia sibi adhibenda privatim ejus operam imploret, cujus officium est et publicè et privatim populum Dei Evangelicâ doctrinâ consolari. Verum eâ moderatione semper utendum est, ne, ubi Deus nihil certum præscribit, conscientiæ certo jugo alligentur. Hinc sequitur, ejus modi confessionem liberam esse oportere, ut non ab omnibus exigatur, sed iis tantum commendetur qui eâ se opus habere intelligent," &c.

has been declared to be ineffectual, unless conveyed to us in earthly vessels. Accordingly, an irrespective power of absolution, dependent solely upon the will of the priesthood, has been claimed by the Church of Rome, and most impiously has it been assumed that the Divine judgments may be arbitrarily launched or withheld, according to the dictations of human caprice. Thus, it was made one of the charges against John Huss, at the council of Constance, that he had denied the position, "that spiritual censures still have their effect even when unjustly pronounced."* When such proofs are before us of the strange lengths to which the perversions of the best institutions of Scripture may be carried, surely it is time for us to pause before we assert an authority thus liable to abuse, beyond the strict letter of what we find clearly written. Spiritual ambition and spiritual timidity, though opposite principles, are both in their turns the besetting weaknesses of our nature, nor can we be too much on our guard against them. Whilst then we admit that Scripture has given its sanction to the practice of mutual confession, and, within certain limits and in a sober sense, may even be alleged in favour of the doctrine of absolution; still, I think, we cannot watch with too suspicious a jealousy, or deprecate too strongly the extension of a claim which, if once allowed to pass the due bounds, will convert the holiest office of Christian charity into tyranny, and a

* It is a striking proof of the effect of party zeal over our better judgments, that a late pious and learned member of this University should have been led to advocate this very doctrine. "I am sorry to see Jeremy Taylor so *heretical* about excommunication. He says, that when *unjust it is no evil*." Froude's Remains, vol. i. p. 322.

When he hears such a sentiment as the one above, declared to be *heretical*, a Protestant will be reminded of the expression of St. Paul: "After the way which they call *heresy*, so worship I the God of my fathers."

solemn trust, intended for the comfort and edification of our afflicted brethren, into a blasphemous usurpation of the incommunicable attributes of the Almighty.

OF PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD.

Of all the deviations from, or superadditions to, the strict letter of Holy Writ which the course of time has introduced, none comes to the pious mind recommended by such strong, pure, and seemingly pious motives, as the usage of prayer for the dead. A religious and affectionate heart left alone, a solitary loiterer in this world, by friends with whom its earliest and best associations were interwoven, anxious for the eternal welfare of those who have been thus taken away, and perhaps, (as is almost ever the case respecting those whom we have loved) reproaching itself for omitted opportunities of kindness towards them when they were capable of receiving it, naturally follows them in thought to the invisible world, and would, if it dare, recommend them by its prayers to the divine mercy. Desires such as these no doubt appear at first sight both amiable and reasonable. But then, in opposition to this train of thought, occurs the misgiving whether we are authorized by that communication of his will which God has revealed to us, to assume this office of intercession; to venture upon this act of interference with his awful and hidden dispensations. Do we know what the intermediate state of the soul is between its separation from the body, and its re-union to it on the day of the resurrection? If we do not, are we justified in assuming what it is from our own mere conjecture, and, building upon that conjecture, in venturing to obtrude our prayers accordingly upon the Almighty? This scruple is one which our common reason obviously suggests to us at the very first aspect

of the question, and for the removal of which we of course have no place of appeal but Scripture only. What then says Scripture? The information which we seek, is too important both to ourselves and to those friends whose loss we mourn, not to find its due place in that full revelation of the divine will which the Bible contains, were the permission sought for in itself reasonable or expedient. We look into our Bibles accordingly, and so far from finding our doubts removed, we remark only a guarded silence from first to last on this important subject. We find in the Levitical law injunctions to prayer and rites of expiation for almost every possible modification of *living* guilt or suffering; men are taught there, and in the later writings of the prophets, to recommend themselves, their relatives, their friends, their country under every variety of circumstances to the divine blessing; but still it is always for the *living* that this service is enjoined. The same observation applies equally to the New Testament. Among all the injunctions of our Saviour and his Apostles on the subject both for ourselves and others, not one word, not one single intimation or insinuation occurs which would appear to sanction any interference on our part *with the mysterious condition of the dead*. This uniform silence on such a subject cannot surely be without its meaning. If any allusions can be traced in the inspired volume to this question, they are at all events too obscure and incidental to throw much light upon it; and the light which they may appear to throw, is adverse and not favourable to the hypothesis stated. Perhaps the following text is as apposite as any which can be named on this subject. "None of them can by any means *redeem his brother*," says the Psalmist, "*nor give to God a ransom for him* ; for the redemption of their souls is

precious, *and it ceaseth for ever.*” * The only record attempted to be quoted in favour of this usage is the well-known passage in the 2d book of Maccabees, a work totally devoid of authority on points of spiritual doctrine, being, as is well-known, merely an abridgment of the larger and now lost history of one Jason of Cyrene, recording events connected with the fortunes of the Jewish nation after the time when it is universally admitted that the inspiration of the Old Testament had ceased.

I repeat then, what God appears thus purposely to have left in the dark cannot surely be deemed to afford a legitimate or innocent opportunity for man’s interference. It is in vain that we urge our finer, our affectionate, and, as we may deem, our holier feelings in favour of this usage. The obvious answer to this plea is, that our religion is a thing revealed to us by heaven, and not derivable from the dreams of our imagination, or the suggestions of our wishes, however apparently well directed. Once pass this well-defined line, and make every thing which in the spiritual world may appear to us a desirable object of belief, an actual article of faith, and there will be no limit whatever to our intellectual and religious wanderings. A Christian man’s faith will in that case become a tissue of mere rapturous mysticism, and every theory which can be made to present a general appearance of plausible attractiveness, or to accord with our finer, perhaps our sickly sympathies, will

* It may be observed that when St. Paul in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, chap. iv., would comfort his flock upon Christian principles, upon the bereavement they sustain by the death of their friends, he does not for a moment allude to any service which they can afford to the dead by their prayers, nor does he encourage any attempt at intercommuning with them, by the practice of any religious observance. And yet surely he would have done so, were such a practice justifiable. His only argument is, “*we shall one day see them again.*” “Them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.”

become permanently interwoven in our minds with the substantial facts of revelation. It appears then to me as a point beyond contradiction, that this impulse which we all feel on certain occasions, and for which we all of us would allege substantial scriptural authority if we could, is one in which it would be neither safe nor innocent to indulge. "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Let me add, that the world has now for many centuries had experience of the practical working of this usage upon the habits and religious feelings of mankind; and, as might be anticipated of a custom which has no divine sanction to plead in its favour, *it has not worked well*. It has led to much delusion and to much superstition; it has suggested religious usages quite alien to the spirit of primitive Christianity; it has hardened and deterred bad men from timely repentance and reformation by holding out to them the delusive hope of posthumous forgiveness through the prayers of the Church; it has become the most prolific source of temporal gain to an ignorant and corrupt priesthood; and last, though not least, it has virtually superseded in men's opinion the one great source of mediation and redemption for the dead as for the living, the all-effective merits of Christ. Such are the obvious arguments against it, to which I am not aware that any satisfactory answer has been returned.

Recommended, however, by so many circumstances of attraction as it obviously possesses, we are not to be surprised that this usage found an early introduction into the Christian church. It is true, that we can remark no trace of it in the writings of the two first centuries, but from the time that Platonism formed its first fatal union with theology, its spread appears to have been rapid. In the writings of Cyprian we find occasional allusions to it, as practised by the Church in

his age. At the same time, it is right to observe, on the other hand, that, in at least two cases where this practice is mentioned by that Father, the mention of the dead in the prayers of the Church appears to have been intended rather for the purpose of returning thanks to the Almighty for the *virtues* of the deceased, than for deprecating future punishment for his *transgressions*. This view of the question, it may be observed, accords exactly with the service of our own liturgy in the prayer for the Church militant, where we “bless God’s holy name for all his servants departed this life in his faith and fear.” The two passages in Cyprian to which I allude are the following. The first occurs in the 36th epistle, in which that good bishop requests of his clergy that they will be careful to note down the exact date of the martyrdom of every sufferer for the Christian faith, in order that the Church may be enabled to make annual mention of them in a commemorative service. “Denique et dies eorum quibus excedunt annotate; ut commemorationes eorum inter memorias martyrum celebrare possimus. Quamquam Tertullus fidelissimus et devotissimus frater noster pro cæterâ sollicitudine et curâ suâ quam fratribus in omni obsequio operationis impertit qui nec illic circa curam corporum deest, scripserit et scribat ac significet mihi dies quibus in carcere beati fratres nostri ad immortalitatem gloriosæ mortis exitu transeunt, et celebrentur hîc a nobis oblationes et sacrificia ob commemorationes eorum, quæ cito vobiscum Domino protegente celebrabimus.” The other passage to which I have alluded occurs in the 65th epistle, where Cyprian is found recommending that, inasmuch as one of his clergy, “Victor,” had in his last will violated one of the regulations of the Church, by appointing a brother Clergyman his Executor, he should not be honoured by the Church in its usual commemoration in the service

for the dead. "Et ideo Victor, cum contra formam nuper in consiliis a sacerdotibus datam Geminium Faustinum presbyterum ausus sit tutorem constituere, non est quòd pro dormitione ejus apud vos fiat oblatio; aut deprecatio aliqua nomine ejus in ecclesiâ frequentetur; ut sacerdotum decretum religiosè et necessariè factum servetur a nobis; simul et cæteris fratribus detur exemplum, ne quis sacerdotes et ministros Dei altari ejus et ecclesiæ vacantes ad seculares molestias devocet." In whatever light we may be disposed to consider the foregoing extracts, the account, at all events, given in the history of the subsequent century is less equivocal. In Augustine's narrative at a later period of the death of his mother Monica, we find him recording in express terms her last injunctions, that the prayers of the Church should be offered up for her after her departure, with a plainness which would show that supplications for the dead had become by that time an established usage. "Ponite, inquit, hoc corpus ubicunque: nihil vos ejus cura conturbet. Tantum illud vos rogo, *ut ad Domini altare memineritis mei, ubi fueritis.*"

It was surely then not without good reason that a custom thus problematical, however attractive, which in the early days of our English reformed Church was considered a kind of open question, should by a wise caution have been in our later formularies totally discouraged. Protestants indeed have been found, at a much later period, who have thought themselves justified in adopting this practice. Thus Dr. Johnson is recorded to have used it; having had his scruples on that point removed by the writings of Dr. Brett, the well-known Non-juror. Others also still more recently have afforded it their sanction. Still it cannot be doubted *that they can cite no scriptural authority for their opinion*; and such being the case, it is not very

obvious by what arguments they can either satisfy their own consciences as to the entire harmlessness of the usage, or venture to recommend it for the adoption of others.

OF ORDINANCES.

The Christian scheme is uniformly designated in Scripture as a system of *spiritual* worship, a religion of liberty, free from the cumbrous and vexatious yoke of mere ritual observances. The means of salvation and justification which it affords, are the expansion of one single fundamental principle, namely, faith in the redeeming merits of Christ, with its necessary accompaniment, holiness of life. The development of this one great primary truth appears to constitute nearly the sole object of St. Paul's teaching. Righteousness by faith, the putting off the old, and putting on the new man, by assimilating ourselves, so far as human nature will allow, to our Redeemer's character; the cancelling of the ineffectual law of works, and the establishment in its place of the covenant of mercy, are the points which he discusses again and again, and recommends to our adoption by every possible variety of argument. Now it is obvious that nothing can be more opposed to the genius of a religion such as that now described, as the setting up again that very system of slavery, and of timid subjection to formal ordinances, from which it was its great object to deliver us. Accordingly we find that if there is one species of error more than another (acts of positive sin alone excepted) against which St. Paul takes every opportunity of entering his solemn protest, it is this one, so attractive to the natural timidity and superstition of the human heart. The whole tenour of his Epistle to the Galatians is the enforcement of this one great doctrine. The Galatians, like many other members of the

Christian Church in all ages, were actually incredulous that the mercies of God could be such as they had heard them described. They could not comprehend how He should be willing to dispense with those onerous rites which constituted the substance of every other existing mode of worship, Jewish or Pagan; and they thought to make their assurance of salvation still more sure by asserting the necessity of circumcision, and of other cancelled rites of the Levitical law. Observe now how the Apostle deals with these views of what might at first sight appear innocent and supererogatory piety. He does not reason with them as merely having adopted a harmless and well-meaning error. He does not, as in charity he might be expected to do, praise the rectitude of their intention, and content himself by merely showing that the Gospel covenant does not really require these servile and formal modes of worship: but he tells them at once that they are setting up for themselves a scheme of justification opposed to and incompatible with that of the Gospel. That if they look for salvation through *the presumed righteousness of ritual observances*, they are in fact *disclaiming that which is offered through the covenant by faith*. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto *another Gospel*. . . . O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? . . . Are ye so foolish? having begun in the *Spirit*, are ye now made perfect by the *flesh*? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? . . . After that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days and months, and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon

you labour in vain. Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." These are strong expressions. Such again are those in the Epistle to the Colossians. "Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holiday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath-days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility. Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (*touch not; taste not; handle not*: which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?" According to the same purport, he prophetically forewarns the Thessalonians, in his 2d Epistle (ii. 6–11), and also Timothy, in his 1st Epistle (iii. and iv.), of the corruptions which the superstitions of future ages, and the spirit of Popery, shall one day introduce into the Church.*

Nothing then, according to St. Paul's view of the subject, can be more alien to the genius of Christianity, than that tendency to deviate from the simple spirit of the Gospel, so natural to timid minds, by the introduction of new and uncalled-for modes of serving God, beyond those which the obvious decencies of public worship and the deference due to the established and legitimate authorities of the Church require. Mere ceremonies, it is true, as such, are among the things indifferent,

* See also the two last chapters of Sir Isaac Newton's remarks on the prophecy of Daniel, with reference to the growth of superstition in the Christian Church.

neither good nor bad. So thought Paul, and so taught Paul, when he declared that "neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision;" when in conformity with a vow he shaved his head, and when, to avoid giving unnecessary offence to the Jews, he circumcised Timothy. But when these things come to be elaborately and ostentatiously set up as conditions of salvation; when the attention is forcibly called away from the inward service of the heart to the mere "modus operandi," the outward service of the body, then assuredly the spiritual worshipper of Christ should begin to be upon his guard, that he attach not to these supplementary accidents of religion that scrupulous deference which is due only to the fundamental principles of faith. Few errors are so truly seductive as this, because few are at once so natural and at the same time so well intentioned. But long experience, the experience of eighteen centuries, has shown that few errors eat more deeply into the very essence of religion, and that rarely, if ever, servility and vitality of devotion can be found together. During a moment of artificial excitement they may serve to enhance, but, like all other stimulants, they will ultimately deaden the feelings which they are intended to encourage. The history of superstition, from its first buddings in the innocent conceits of a sensitive mind, through all the gradual accumulations of successive generations, until it finally settled in the establishment of Popery, affords a humiliating and instructive lesson to the Christian student. It informs him how much serious harm he may ultimately be doing to the cause of true religion when, in yielding to an excited imagination, he finds himself preferring strong sensations to sound reason, and setting up human inventions in rivalry with the injunctions of Scripture. Compare Paul the tent-maker, contentedly working at

his humble occupation, in order that he might be enabled to preach gratuitously the Gospel of Christ, with Simeon upon his pillar, or Anthony in the deserts of the Thebaid. What a transition does the view present from the sober fervour of enlightened Christianity to the ravings of a benighted fanaticism! And yet towards the production of this latter stage every member of the early church had contributed his share, who in the course of the three first centuries had lent his aid in encumbering anew his religion with that tissue of slavish observances from which Christ had made him free. "Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility." These words of St. Paul, already quoted, afford a sound and wholesome lesson. Nothing is so entirely becoming to our nature as that submission of the heart and soul to the divine will which the Gospel prescribes. But how different is this from the abject degradation of both mind and body, which superstition, whether Pagan or self-styled Christian, would inculcate! We hear much now-a-days of the submission of our understanding to the dictation of our spiritual instructors, and to the superior wisdom of antiquity, as though the surrender of our own judgment, and the blind adoption of primitive usages, were only another name for Christian faith. Let it be at least recollected, that the humility prescribed by the Gospel extends to every portion of the human race alike; to the teacher no less than to the pupil. But the humility which is attempted to be taught by the dictation of uninspired men, inculcating their own theories as portions of Holy Writ, if it encourages the prostration of the understanding on the one part, is no less favourable to spiritual tyranny and dogmatism on the other. It lowers the scholar by attempting to deify the teacher. The faith which it would enjoin as a Christian duty is not a humble trust in God's promises,

but in man's fallible dictation. This tendency, which has been more or less visible in all ages where tradition has been in any degree set up as a co-rival with Scripture, has ever been strongest at those times when momentary excitement has given an artificial value to human theories at the expense of the sober wisdom of revelation. In Sulpicius Severus's curious account of the monks of the Thebaid, we read some singular illustrations of the extent to which under the notion of submission to legitimate spiritual authority, the fanatics of that period carried their voluntary humiliation. Thus we are told of one novice who, being ordered by his ghostly superior, as a proof of his obedience, to walk boldly into a blazing oven, whilst heating for the purpose of baking bread, did so, and was rewarded, as we are of course told, by coming out uninjured. Another had the unpromising task imposed upon him of watering unceasingly for the space of more than two years, a dry branch of storax capriciously stuck into the burning sand, at a distance of two miles from the Nile, by the president of his monastery. It is consolatory to find that in the course of the third year his faith had its recompence, by the plant acquiring sufficient strength to be able to dispense with his further attendance.

Such are the strange caprices to which human superstition, when left to draw its own conclusions on the subject of the divine worship, has a tendency to betake itself. When, indeed, they are considered in this extreme point of view, there is no tolerably cultivated human mind which does not at once perceive their absurdity, and their total want of congeniality with the spirit of the Gospel. But, as has already been observed, it is through many progressive stages and gradually deepening shades that we arrive at this their utmost point. Every human invention which we set up in

rivalry to the written word,—every form of worship, however originally innocent, or even expedient, as contributing to the decorum of our public ceremonies, partakes, in some degree, of the same character, the moment that it ceases to be considered as a form, and is elevated, as is too often the case, into an article of faith. We cannot safely extend the spirit of Scripture, any more than we can, by mere human authority, add to its letter. The boundary is one which, if we choose to draw the line at the right place, we cannot possibly mistake. But if we once pass beyond it, and amid the thickening crowd of fanciful theories begin to ask ourselves which we shall adopt as necessary, which discard as superstitious, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to say where we are to stop. The propriety of turning to the East in prayer; the comparative merits of the Surplice and of the Cope, of the praying-stool or of the reading-desk, will afford as eager subjects of controversy to theologians in the 19th century, as the quartodeciman question on the rival claims of the circular or semicircular tonsure did to Bede and his brother controversialists in the 8th. And thus in the discussion of trifles, the momentous fundamentals of our faith become partially overlooked. One suggestion leads to another. Every imaginary discovery, every admission once made, is succeeded as a matter of course by some unanswerable consequence, until the whole of our religion becomes a fantastic dream, and revelation disappears under an accumulation of extraneous notions.

It is however, let me again repeat, with no feeling of hostility to the authorized ceremonials, or to the decent splendour of religious worship, that these remarks are written. Very far from it. Religion can, no more than social order and the authority of secular government, be maintained under the existing constitution of our

nature, without such external forms and established associations as call forth the reverence of the mind, and oblige it to submit itself unresistingly to the dictations of good order, sound sense, and enlightened discipline. God, we are told, is the author of order, not of confusion. Did we possess no other sanction for the establishment of Church government with its attendant ceremonials, this one would be sufficient, as binding upon the conscience of every well-intentioned Christian. The authority of the spiritual is, at all events, as sacred as that of the secular magistrate, when exercised in discretion, and with reference to the will of Him from whom all power is derived. The language of the 20th Article of our Church appears to reach that precise point, short of which none but the self-willed and arrogant would wish to stop, and beyond which none but the advocate of spiritual despotism would desire to advance. Forms and ceremonials there must be. But they can, by any possibility, exist only in concurrence with a feeling of deference to those who bear legitimate authority, and a predisposition to conform to those usages which a wise antiquity, or the common consent of our enlightened Christian brethren, have consecrated. The moment, however, that this reasonable boundary is passed, that things indifferent are enjoined as integral points of doctrine, and that man steps in to exercise an authority for which he has received no commission, then, indeed, it becomes every follower of Christ to stand forth in defence of that liberty which his Redeemer has established. Nor should it be forgotten, that great as the sin of schism undoubtedly is, its guilt attaches not so much to those who, solely from a wish to preserve their mode of divine worship in its primitive purity, withdraw from a community whose usages they disapprove, as to those who encumber their articles of fellowship with condi-

tions which Scripture gives them no warrant to demand. Where, indeed, we are to draw that exact line,—where the right of legitimate dictation ceases, and superstitious usurpation begins, will always be difficult to determine, and will be variously judged of according to the different modes of human feeling. But he who has drunk in deeply the full spirit of revelation, will always be the best judge upon these contested points. A sincerely humble Christian will never be forward to question or criticise the religious usages to which he has been accustomed from his childhood. And where such a person feels strongly that the ordinances to which he is called upon to conform are either superstitious in themselves, or calculated to introduce superstition in their remote consequences, the remonstrance of that person deserves, at all events, to be listened to. The golden rule laid down by St. Paul is, that the conscience of the weak, and not of the strong-minded brethren, is in these cases the principle which should regulate our conduct; and even those superfluous scruples demand our respect, which proceed from a wish, even in matters of indifference, not to go beyond what divine revelation has sanctioned. Had this rule been enforced in the by-gone ages, it is needless to observe from how much spiritual tyranny—how much degradation of the whole human character—how much obscuration of the spirit of Christianity, mankind would have been spared. That future generations may not again fall into the darkness which bewildered their forefathers, can be effected only by their being forewarned of the seductive fallacies which misled them; and by their adhering firmly and unceasingly to that infallible guide, which God, in his infinite mercy, has vouchsafed to his helpless and erring creatures, THE INSPIRED SCRIPTURES.

